PRESBYTERIANISM AND THE NEW AMERICAN NATION, 1783-1826: A CASE STUDY OF RELIGION AND NATIONAL LIFE

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PREFACE

This is not a history of one denomination. It is a case study which intends an analysis of Presbyterianism in relation to the American nation. As such, it ignores large areas of development which were of vital concern to the Presbyterians and possibly may also be to their descendants of the present day. Those aspects of Presbyterianism related to the internal development of the denomination, for example, have been considered only when they were intimately related, or thought to be related, to the total life of the nation. While "Presbyterianism," as one expression of American religious life, is the subject of investigation, the "new American nation" controls the lines of inquiry.

I have not made an attempt to assess the influence of Presbyterianism in and on the American nation or to trace the evolution of religious ideas in the secular realm. While there has been temptation to draw conclusions about such matters, my goals have been much more limited. In Part I, I have sought only to understand how the Presbyterians interpreted events in America and how they wished to shape the future of America. In this I have tried to recover the religious dimensions of their national aspirations and explore the conceptual framework for them, rather than to "demythologize" or to propose motivation from some other quarter. I have hoped to make some contribution toward the understanding of religion as a dynamic social force. In Part II, I have sought to demonstrate in what ways and through what religious institutions the Presbyterians attempted to transform their goals for the nation into reality. No attempt has been made to estimate the extent of their success, but it is hoped that this study, in conjunction with others, may provide a first step toward raising questions of that nature.

There are several reasons why a study of this kind seems necessary. The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was one of the most powerful religious bodies in America during the period from 1783 to 1826. At the beginning of this period it ranked second only to the Congregationalists in numbers of churches, and in 1830 Presbyterians ranked third nationally, having passed the Congregationalists but falling behind both the Baptists and Methodists. The figures, however, belie actual strength. The Presbyterians were concentrated in the Middle and Southern states, which placed them in a position from which their influence reached over most of the nation, while Congregationalism was largely confined to New England. The Presbyterians entered their national experience unified, well organized, and possessing social status and prestige. From the presbyteries to the General Assembly, the Presbyterians possessed a national organization which even reached into parts of New England. Thus it dwarfed that of the federal government, to say nothing of other religious bodies. By comparison the Congregationalists and Baptists were hampered by a congregational polity which made collective action difficult, and the Methodists were still under the guidance of a lone bishop on horseback. In terms of social prestige the highly educated Presbyterians stood far above the Methodists and Baptists, and rivaled the Episcopalians who had suffered because of their connections with England. The General Assembly, which met every year during May in Philadelphia, was viewed by Charles Beecher as "one of the most impressive as well as powerful bodies in the world." According to Beecher the Assembly, which was made up of representatives from all over America, "swayed a power rivaling, if not really surpassing that of Congress, and affecting not merely the religious, but the civil interests of the nation."[1]

In spite of its position of national importance, Presbyterianism during this era has been largely overlooked by critical historians as a subject for investigation. Presbyterian historiography generally is sparse. One searches in vain for a recent critical history of Presbyterianism in the United States. The most recent attempt was that of Robert Ellis Thompson in 1895.[2] Modern treatments have been restricted in temporal or geographic terms. Leonard J. Trinterud wrote an excellent study of colonial Presbyterianism which traces the developments down to the reorganization of 1788.[3] Lefferts A. Loetscher has written a history of theological developments within the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America since 1869.[4] There is, therefore, no modern general treatment of Presbyterianism from 1789 to 1869. This period has received some attention in the regional studies of Sweet, Posey, Thompson, Rudolph and Nichols.[5] These studies, however, focus predominently on the southern and western regions of the nation, thus leaving major centers of Presbyterian strength untouched by modern critical scholarship. This lacuna in Presbyterian historiography is a major hindrance to those wishing a greater understanding of the development of religion in America, and the present study is designed in part to meet this need.

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[1] Autobiography, Correspondence, etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D., ed. by Charles Beecher (2 vols.; New York, 1864-65), II, 423.

[2] A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States, Vol. VI of The American Church History Series, ed. by Philip Schaff, et al. (13 vols.; New York: Christian Literature Co., 1894-97).

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[3] The Forming of An American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949).

[4] The Broadening Church: A Study of the Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church Since 1869 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954).

[5] William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. II: The Presbyterians, 1783-1840: A Collection of Source Materials (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936); Walter Brownlow Posey, The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest, 1778-1838 (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1952); Ernest Trice Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, Volume One: 1607-1861 (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963); L. C. Rudolph, Hoosier Zion: The Presbyterians in Early Indiana (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); Robert Hastings Nichols, Presbyterianism in New York State: A History of the Synod and Its Predecessors, ed. and completed by James Hastings Nichols (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963).

In addition to the obvious need for additional investigation in a neglected era of an important denomination there is another factor of equal significance. The older secondary, as well as many of the more recent accounts of various aspects of this period, have been written as instances of "denominational historiography." As a result of this their focus has been on those areas of development affecting the denomination itself. In the specific case of the Presbyterians, emphasis has been given to manifestation of divisions within the church which have been interpreted as critical. Although Presbyterians were united in a single institution between 1758 and 1837, denominational historians have relentlessly sought to distinguish between parties throughout that period. During this time several generations of leaders came and departed and the issues actually varied considerably. No single vote taken in the General Assembly prior to the mid-1820's really discloses very much about the impending Old School and New School fissure. The alignments in every case were substantially different from the lines of division which occurred in 1838.

From a broader perspective it is the striking degree of continuity and homogeneity that is more significant. The period from 1783 to 1826 was one of the most harmonious in Presbyterian history, and on matters of national life the unity was even more striking. It was in fact the degree of conformity that made minor variations the subject of often-bitter controversy. The large areas of agreement among Presbyterians were of far greater importance, from a national perspective, than the shades of differences within these areas. The presbyterian form of government, with presbyterial control over ministerial education, ordination and appointment, was designed to promote uniformity, and the efficiency with which any variation was detected and brought to trial further tended to produce conformity. While such a tightly-knit group of men could exercise great power on a national level, that same homogeneity makes a case study of this sort more fruitful.

The significance of Presbyterianism in the religious life of the new nation has received inadequate attention in the more general interpretative histories of religion in America. Theological similarity to the more thoroughly investigated Congregationalists of New England has also led to interpretation of Presbyterianism as its appendage. [The New England religious tradition, parenthetically, has been subject to the same misconstruction noted above.] The discussion by Winthrop Hudson is illustrative. At the beginning of the national era, according to Hudson, the Presbyterians and Congregationalists "had come to regard themselves as a single phalanx, with a regional allocation of territory." While this seems accurate enough, Hudson later discusses the "Protestant counter offensive" of the early nineteenth century about which he said, "The Protestant America that the several denominations sought to fashion was defined in what may roughly be described as New England terms."[6] This present study calls into question such facile, and often-repeated generalizations. Presbyterianism possessed a distinctive theological tradition influenced by John Witherspoon which antedated the foundation of Princeton Theological Seminary and the Princeton Theology. Long before Charles Hodge became the "assailant par excellence" of New England theology, the Presbyterians followed a theological course which differentiated their reflection on the nation from that of New England.[7]

In addition to these factors which make a study of early nineteenth century Presbyterianism desirable, a study of this kind affords the possibility of a greater understanding of problems that have concerned historians for a number of years. As a case study it cuts across a whole range of subjects that are vital to an understanding of religion in

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[6] American Protestantism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 51, 60.

[7] Sidney E. Ahlstrom, "Theology in America: A Historical Survey," The Shaping of American Religion, Vol. I of Religion in American Life, ed. by James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 267.

America. Such phenomena as religious liberty, the effects of disestablishment, the relationship between religion and nationalism, concern for the national destiny, the denomination as a religious institution, and the voluntary societies are all touched upon in the course of this study. While definitive solutions to these broader problems can not be proposed on the basis of a case study, the survey of neglected materials can lead to clarification of the problems and make possible the identification of some areas where a revision of prevailing interpretations is needed.

I wish to thank all those whose efforts have contributed to this study. Many, too numerous to mention, have helped in indirect ways. My gratitude is none the less real. In particular, I am grateful to Russell E. Richey for his interest in the study and for our several conversations which helped give shape to the problems. I wish to thank Professor Horton Davies for his encouragement and willingness to provide opportunity for the initial research. I am most grateful to Professor John F. Wilson, an exemplary advisor.

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PART I

PRESBYTERIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE NATION

CHAPTER I

PROVIDENCE

A central doctrine in the Presbyterian reflection about the new nation was that regarding providence. Providence served as a modal conception through which the Presbyterians interpreted America's past and the unfolding present, and more importantly, as an intellectual framework in which Presbyterians sought to give direction to the nation's future. During the early part of this period the doctrine of providence underwent marked development from a dynamic concept of God's personal activity in history toward a static belief that God worked primarily through natural, moral laws which could be discovered by man. This development, which came about primarily from the incorporation of the moral philosophy of John Witherspoon and Samuel Stanhope Smith into the doctrine, also entailed a shift in emphasis in the subject matter of providence. The changed content of the doctrine of providence confirmed that the development went beyond the pattern of Christian thought which traditionally viewed God's activity in history as a demand for human response in the present. As God's activity seemed to be less capricious, and more predictable on the basis of human behavior, providence became more concerned with the social, political and moral activity of man than the movement of God in nature. Thus man rather than God became the controlling focus in the emerging doctrine of providence.

The status of the doctrine of providence among Presbyterians in 1783 can be estimated through a survey of the sermons delivered on December 11th. This was a day recommended by "the United States in Congress assembled . . . to the several states . . . as a day of public thanksgiving, that all the people may then assemble to celebrate with grateful hearts and united voices, the praises of their Supreme and all bountiful Benefactor, for his numberless favors and mercies."[1] The Presbyterian divines took advantage of this day appointed by "public authority" to rejoice over victory in a war that they had supported wholeheartedly and to remind their congregations that victory came as a result of God's activity in providence.

The idea that God controlled the movement and destiny of nations was widely accepted among Americans of all descriptions. The congressional proclamation reflected this belief by declaring that "the interposition of Divine Providence in our favour hath been abundantly and most graciously manifested."[2] Among Presbyterians the doctrine was so firmly entrenched that it was simply presupposed. Of the major Presbyterian spokesmen, only John Witherspoon felt it necessary to preface his description of the hand of providence in the revolution with a brief statement of "these known and general truths."[3] George Duffield, pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, began his thanksgiving sermon by declaring that the revolution "affords an irrefragable argument (to convince even an Atheist) that the MOST HIGH ruleth over the affairs of men, and raiseth up, and casteth down, at his pleasure." Without further explanation he launched into a providential interpretation of the revolution.[4]

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[1] Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789, ed. by Gaillard Hunt (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), XXV, 699-700.

[2] *Ibid.*

The key phrase in Duffield's remarks was "at his pleasure." God rather than man was the primary participant in the war and his hand was everywhere visible to the Presbyterian eye. It was God who had unified the American people and given harmony to their public councils. It was God who had raised up a powerful ally in France. Washington, that "Joshua of the day," had been "inspired from above with every military endowment."[5] According to John Rodgers, collegiate pastor in New York, the successes of the American armies at the Battle of Trenton and in the following campaigns "so clearly point us to the finger of God, that it would be unpardonable stupidity not to notice it, and the basest ingratitude not to acknowledge it."[6] In the Presbyterian view God not only strengthened and supported the Americans but also confused the British and was directly responsible for their errors of judgment that allowed an inferior power to gain military victory. It was America's duty to be grateful for a victory bestowed by the dynamic God of providence.[7]

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[3] The Works of John Witherspoon (4 vols.; Philadelphia, 1800-1801), II, 455.

[4] George Duffield, A Sermon . . . (Boston, 1784), p. 1.

[5] Ibid., p. 18.

Perry Miller has viewed this whole series of thanksgiving sermons, on a national scale, as the repudiation of the jeremiad and the termination of the widespread influence of its parent, federal or covenant theology. According to Miller, a New England idea that the colonists were in a contractual relationship with God had permeated America so that prior to the war British oppression was nearly universally viewed as punishment for America's failure to fulfill its contractual obligations. During the revolution the jeremiad, "a threatening of further visitation upon the covenanted people until they returned to their bond by confession and reformation,"[8] had been focused exclusively on the evils of British rule.

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[6] John Rodgers, The Divine Goodness Displayed in the American Revolution (New York, 1784), p. 20.

[7] Works of Witherspoon, II, 451-475.

[8] Perry Miller, "From the Covenant to the Revival," The Shaping of American Religion, p. 327.

> A theology which for almost two centuries had assumed that men would persistently sin, and so would have to be recurrently summoned to communal repentance, had for the first time identified its basic conception with a specific political action. Then, for the first time in the life of the conception, the cause was totally gained.[9]

An idea and a technique which had been admirably suited to invigorating the rebelling colonists could not effectively unify American Protestantism once the war was won. According to Miller, demoralization produced by the morally degenerate nature of American life in the 1790's, a division of American society coincident with the French Revolution, and the fear of latent barbarism produced by the expanding frontier combined to force the American churches "to recognize that in fact they now dealt with the Deity only as particular individuals gathered for historical, capricious reasons into this or that communion." In this situation, "They had to realize, at first painfully, that as a united people they had no contractual relationship with the Creator, and that consequently a national controversy with Him could no longer exist."[10] The churches were forced to "yield government to the secular concept of the social compact, accept the First Amendment, and so to concentrate, in order to resist Deism and to save their souls, upon that other mechanism of cohesion developed out of their colonial experience, the Revival."[11]

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 343.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 357-358.

Whatever the merits of Miller's analysis of this alleged metamorphosis of American Protestantism, most emphatically it fails to take account of the marked diversity within Protestantism in the Early National Period. The presumption of cultural coherence that served Miller so well in his studies of New England Puritanism cannot be transferred to the more pluralistic Protestantism of the early nineteenth century. Thus there is some difficulty in dealing with Miller's basic thesis because of his failure to distinguish between different kinds of covenants and between covenantal and non-covenantal ideas of providence. He lumps all of these together in the single term "Covenant." While undeniably there were covenantal overtones in the Presbyterian sermons of 1783, by no means was there explicit acknowledgment of a national covenant. A more adequate description would interpret them as a dynamic view of God's providential government of the world. However correct Miller's thesis is in general terms, the primary evolution of Presbyterian thought about the nation in the period 1783 to 1826 was not "from the covenant to the revival" but from a dynamic toward a static understanding of providence. In both cases the nation was conceived to be the essential unit in God's government of the world.

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[11] _Ibid._, p. 350.

Miller's thesis also does not account for the substantially different course taken by American Presbyterianism under the leadership of John Witherspoon. After the influence of Witherspoon began to be effective, Presbyterians ceased to reflect the theological development of New England Congregationalism. The most obvious indication of this was in the schisms of the nineteenth century. During the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century, both the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists divided into "New Light" and "Old Light" parties. In the Early National Period, however, the Congregationalists of New England split into "orthodox" and Unitarian factions while the Presbyterians divided into the Old School and New School, both of which were "orthodox."

When Witherspoon delivered his thanksgiving sermon in 1783, he had already been president of the College of New Jersey for over fourteen years and had been the most active American Presbyterian in the affairs of the nation. This sermon represented a stage in the transition in the doctrine of providence which took place under his influence. The sermon was made up of two parts. The first and longest portion was a development of the traditional doctrine of providence, very much like the other sermons of the day, in which Witherspoon rehearsed the events of the revolution which indicated that American victory should be interpreted as a favor of providence. In the second section, or the "improvement of the subject," Witherspoon dropped the theme of providence and offered the congregation some "instruction and direction." This instruction was based upon the conclusions that Witherspoon had derived from his study of moral philosophy. Witherspoon declared that the prosperity of the new nation depended on the promotion of "religion and good morals," and he admonished his hearers to "cherish a love of piety, order, industry, (and) frugality." In conclusion, the Princeton divine, who had not envisioned the emergence of a single nation, predicted that "whatsoever state among us shall continue to make piety and virtue the standard of public honor, will enjoy the greatest inward peace, the greatest national happiness, and in every outward conflict will discover the greatest constitutional strength."[12]

Witherspoon made no attempt to integrate the two parts of the sermon. He was convinced that "piety, order, industry, (and) frugality" were beneficial to the health and prosperity of nations, but he did not seek to make the activity of God toward the nation dependent on adherence to these principles. At a later time these principles became an integral part of the doctrine of providence. As such they achieved the status of orthodoxy and were inculcated under the designation of "religion," whereas Witherspoon frankly considered them as "political."

The means of Witherspoon's influence was his

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[12] Works of Witherspoon, II, 452-475.

Lectures on Moral Philosophy.[13] Although never intended by him for publication, and not appearing in print until the first edition of his works in 1800, Witherspoon's Lectures enjoyed a remarkable circulation prior to that time. All students at the College of New Jersey were required to transcribe them and these copies were used as texts and copied by students in schools under the direction of graduates from Princeton.[14]

Witherspoon's Lectures show the influence of the Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense. The method of this philosophy of realism was one of observation and induction of facts.[15] Its significance for the development of American Presbyterianism could hardly be overestimated, for it provided the philosophical framework for a century of Presbyterian theology.[16] The influence of the Scottish Philosophy simply meant that Presbyterianism developed independently of the New England religious tradition, which was sharply influenced by the idealism of Jonathan Edwards.

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[13] John Witherspoon, ed. by Varnum Lansing Collins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1912). I have used this critical edition throughout.

[14] Memoirs of William Graham, First President of Washington College, Va. (Manuscript, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, n.d.), n.p.

[15] James McCosh, Scottish Philosophy (New York, 1884), p. 9.

[16] For a discussion of the influence of the Scottish Philosophy on American theology see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," Church History, XXIV (September, 1955), 262-266.

It would be interesting to speculate on the probable development of Presbyterianism had Edwards, Witherspoon's elder by only twenty years, lived to a ripe old age as president of the College of New Jersey. The radical difference between the two was acknowledged on the first page of Witherspoon's *Lectures*. "An author of New England," wrote Witherspoon, with a footnote citing Edwards' *The Nature of True Virtue*, "says, moral philosophy is just reducing infidelity to a system." Witherspoon concluded that "however specious the objections, they will be found at bottom not solid." In stating his objections to Edwards, Witherspoon gave expression to a central theme in the intellectual life of Presbyterianism which was responsible for the subsequent conflation of the doctrine of providence and moral philosophy. "If the Scripture is true, the discoveries of reason cannot be contrary to it. . . . There may be an illustration and conformation of the inspired writings, from reason and observation, which will greatly add to their beauty and force."[17]

The various expressions of this principle by three successive presidents of the College of New Jersey shed light on the development of the doctrine of providence. Witherspoon held that reason and Scripture both yielded truth, but maintained a rather rigid distinction between them. Samuel Stanhope Smith, Witherspoon's successor and son-in-law, accepted reason as on a par with Scripture and integrated the conclusions from each in a unified system of thought. Ashbel Green, who succeeded Smith, accepted the conclusions Witherspoon and Smith derived from reason as the orthodox interpretation of Scripture, ultimately making reason subservient to religious orthodoxy.

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[17] Witherspoon, *Lectures*, pp. 1-2. This point was enlarged upon in the first of the *Lectures on Divinity*. See *Works of Witherspoon* (9 vols.; Edinburgh, 1805), VIII, 11-12; Trinterud, *Forming of an American Tradition*, pp. 222-225.

In writing his Lectures, Witherspoon explained his own use of reason. Defining moral philosophy as "an inquiry into the nature and grounds of moral obligation by reason, as distinct from revelation," Witherspoon ultimately rejected reason as the final court of appeal in moral action. "Though there is no occasion to join Mr. Hutchinson or any other, in their opposition to such as make reason the principle of virtuous conduct, yet I think it must be admitted, that a sense of moral good and evil, is . . . really a principle of our nature." This "moral sense" Witherspoon believed to be nothing other than conscience. "It is the law which our Maker has written upon our hearts, and both intimates and enforces duty, previous to all reasoning."[18]

In Witherspoon's thought the moral sense was the foundation of all virtue. In the nature of things, he believed that there was a distinction between good and bad, vice and virtue. Witherspoon rejected the idea that virtue was only conformity to the will of God on the grounds that "to say God, by his will, might have made the same temper and conduct virtuous and excellent, which we now call vicious, seems to unhinge all our notions of the supreme excellence even of God himself." By taking "conscience enlightened by reason (and) experience" man ultimately arrived at a "rule of duty" which was but a "transcript" of the moral excellence of God.[19]

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[18] Witherspoon, Lectures, pp. 1, 17-18.

Although Witherspoon thus emphasized the harmony of "piety and science," he did not, at least in his published writings, synthesize his philosophical conclusions and his theology. A recent investigation of Witherspoon's political philosophy concludes that the biblical contribution to Witherspoon's political thought was "almost nothing." This same writer says, "When one probes yet deeper into the prevailing character of Witherspoon's views he discovers a background conflict between conservative theology and Enlightenment philosophy which the Princeton professor never synthesized."[20] The reverse is equally true. Witherspoon's political thought had little impact on his theology.

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[19] Ibid., pp. 28-30.

[20] James L. McAllister, "John Witherspoon: Academic Advocate for American Freedom," A Miscellany of American Christianity, ed. by Stuart C. Henry (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1963), pp. 218, 222.

This assertion as it applied to natural law and the rule of providence is borne out by a comparison of Witherspoon's treatment of jurisprudence in the Lectures with his thanksgiving sermon of 1783 already cited. In the Lectures Witherspoon determined that a constitution of any government was good if it tended to "make men good . . . for when the general disposition of a people is against the laws, they cannot long subsist even by a strict and rigorous execution on the part of the rulers." The best way to make law enforceable was to promote religion, for "virtue and piety are inseparably connected." Further, "laws should be so framed as to promote such principles in general, as are favorable to good government." Without going into detail, Witherspoon listed "sobriety, industry, and public spirit" as the chief principles favoring good government.[21] This formed the basis of his "instruction" in the thanksgiving sermon, which was distinct from his treatment of the doctrine of providence.

II

It is entirely possible that Witherspoon may have at times merged these two areas of his thought in lectures or in discussions with students, but there is no evidence of this in his written works. It is also possible that a number of his students independently synthesized the two, but it cannot be denied that Samuel Stanhope Smith was the primary and most influential architect of a synthesis of natural law and federal theology. This is especially true with regard to the doctrine of providence and the laws governing the prosperity or decline of nations. As student, son-in-law, colleague, and successor to Witherspoon as president of the College of New Jersey, Smith was best situated to obtain the fullest insight into Witherspoon's thought and possessed the best opportunity to build upon his work. While eventually Smith's labor was to be repudiated by the denominational leadership, that did not happen until well after he had left an indelible mark on Presbyterian thought.

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[21] Witherspoon, Lectures, pp. 110-113.

While Witherspoon had held that the discoveries of reason could not be contrary to Scripture, he maintained a rather rigid, sometimes artificial, separation between the two. Smith, however, was both more optimistic concerning the possibilities of reason achieving truth and more prone to integrate such discoveries with theology. In his *Lectures on the Evidences of the Christian Religion* he unequivocally declared that science agreed with religion.

> Truth is always consistent with itself, and with all other truths. Error, though it may be disguised, and to superficial observation, may seem to bear a semblance of truth; yet in such a wide field of moral, historical, and natural science, as is embraced in the holy scriptures, it is extremely improbable that any scheme of falsehood and imposture, fabricated

> especially in such an early age, should not contain many discrepancies with the actual system, moral or physical, of the world, which would be made more and more manifest by the improvements of science. But improvements in genuine science have hitherto only more clearly elucidated and confirmed the doctrines of the scriptures, and especially the facts of sacred history.[22]

Smith's first encounter with the intellectual world was an example of his integration of science and the scriptures. Elected to the American Philosophical Society in 1785, he delivered an oration before that organization two years later which was expanded and published as _An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species_. The purpose of this work was "to establish the unity of the human species, by tracing its varieties to their natural causes," thereby "bringing in science to confirm the verity of the Mosaic history." Renouncing any intention of "introducing the authority of religion to silence enquiry" or to make it a "substitute for proof," Smith confined his investigation to a study of the effects of natural forces, climate and manner of living on the body.[23]

As a moral philosopher Smith was much more rigorous and carried on more intensive investigation than Witherspoon.[24]

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[22] Samuel Stanhope Smith, _Lectures on the Evidences of the Christian Religion_ (Philadelphia, 1809), p. 322.

[23] Samuel Stanhope Smith (2nd ed.; New Brunswick, 1810), pp. 4-5.

[24] Paul Russell Anderson and Max Harold Fisch, _Philosophy in America from the Puritans to James, With Representative Selections_ (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1939), p. 297. Anderson contends that Smith is a more representative figure than Witherspoon.

Smith was primarily concerned with the investigation of the "laws of nature." While he acknowledged that the "weakness of the human understanding" prevented man from knowing the "essential nature of things in which the laws of their action are founded," the laws themselves could be understood.

> The uniformity of a multitude of facts, arising from the action of any subject, which, tho' unknown in its essence, we conclude, from our experience of the constancy of nature, will, in similar circumstances, always operate in the same way. This uniformity of effect, or rather, perhaps, the unknown but constant cause on which it depends, is denominated a law of nature.[25]

In locating and defining natural laws, Smith insisted that "the same rules ought to be observed which have been followed in natural philosophy ever since the age of the great Newton." The rules he listed were:

> 1. That no law should be admitted on hypothesis but should rest solely on an induction of facts.
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> . . . .
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> 2. That laws collected from an ample and accurate induction of facts should be deemed universal, till other facts occur to invalidate, or limit the conclusions which have been drawn from them.
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> 3. Laws founded on a partial induction of facts should not be extended beyond the limits to which they are certainly known to apply.
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> 4. That similar appearances should, because of the uniformity of nature, be referred, as far as possible, to the same causes.
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> 5. That the testimony of our senses, and of all our simple perceptions, ought to be admitted as true, and no ulterior evidence be required of the reality, or the nature of the facts which they confirm.[26]

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[25] Samuel Stanhope Smith, The Lectures . . . on the Subjects of Moral and Political Philosophy (2 vols.; New York, 1812), I, 14-15.

[26] Ibid., I, 19-23.

As the record of man's activity, history was the subject to which this methodology was to be applied and from which the moral laws of nature were to be derived. Witherspoon had introduced the study of history into the curriculum of the College of New Jersey.[27] He felt that history was "necessary for providing the truths of natural, and confirming those of revealed religion."[28] Witherspoon's lectures were scanty and have survived in a single, fragmentary manuscript of a student's notes. Smith continued and strengthened the study of history, believing that "history may be regarded as a volume of moral experiment."[29]

Smith's system of moral philosophy embraced what today would be differentiated into ethics, natural theology, politics, and international relations. The indebtedness to Witherspoon is immediately apparent. His definitions of the moral sense and virtue, for example, are adopted wholly from his father-in-law.[30] Because of the sketchy nature of Witherspoon's work and the fullness of Smith's, the latter proves more fruitful as a source to study the Princeton intellectual influence on American Presbyterianism. Of particular interest because of the influence on the doctrine of providence are those portions dealing with natural laws governing the fate of nations. Smith held that "the prosperity of nations . . . (is) intimately connected with the practical knowledge of those truths at the cultivation and improvement of which this science aims."[31]

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[27] John Rodgers, The Faithful Servant Rewarded (New York, 1795), p. 33.

[28] Varnum Lansing Collins, President Witherspoon: A Biography (2 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1925), II, 14.

[29] Smith, Moral and Political Philosophy, I, 12.

[30] *Ibid.*, I, 300-302; II, 63-93.

While the suggestions of Smith were at no point brought together in a single discussion, there emerged from the whole certain virtues which would, in the nature of things, provide for national happiness. In a discussion of public spirit as a virtue, however, he pointed to those qualities which combine to insure the prosperity of nations. Public spirit

> is justly denominated virtue; not only because genuine public spirit is itself one of the chief virtues, but it is intimately associated with frugality, temperance, justice, piety, respect for religion, and all those noble qualities, most immediately related to the great interests of the community. When these decline, public spirit speedily follows the declension, and the national glory and happiness sink with them.[32]

While piety and respect for religion appear last in this list, it is clear that religion was considered to be the foundation of the prosperity and happiness of states. Smith believed that nations could flourish under any kind of government, even a despotism, but in order for a despotism to survive he thought that it must encourage and have the support of religion.[33] Religion was the only force powerful enough to form the basis for the other virtues necessary to hold society together. While Smith, like Witherspoon, listed conscience, general interest and religion as the sanctions for virtue, he concluded that without religion the others would be too feeble.[34] Religion was natural to all men. From the sense of morality there rose notions of the natural law and its Creator. While these perceptions of divinity needed to be cultivated, and varied in their correctness from one society to another, they exerted the most powerful incentive to morality.

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[31] Ibid., I, 25. It may be an injustice to Smith to extract and rearrange such small segments of his work. He was, more than most, committed to a "system," and his work, though overlooked, seems important enough to receive treatment as such. See for example his A Comprehensive View of the Leading and Most Important Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion (New Brunswick, 1815).

[32] Smith, Moral and Political Philosophy, II, 280.

> The informations of reason, or the restraints of conscience, unsupported by this principle, would impose too feeble a check on the force of irregular propensities, or the impulse of unlawful passions. A vicious man, accountable only to himself, would soon learn to overbear the remonstrances of his own mind. For although an atheist, educated in the midst of a religious people, may be preserved within the bounds of a decent morality, by respect for himself, or a prudent deference to the opinion of the world; yet if the belief of the existence of God were eradicated from the public mind, the mass of the people would esteem secrecy alone to be a sufficient justification of any action dictated by inclination. That useful influence which public opinion now creates in favor of virtuous manners, would on the prevalence of a general atheism cease to exist, and the bands of

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[33] *Ibid.*, I, 93-94; II, 238.

[34] *Ibid.*, II, 93.

> society, which are effectually maintained only by the public morals, would hasten to be dissolved.[35]

One of the principal doctrines of religious belief that Smith believed to be most effective in promoting morality was a belief in a future life with rewards and punishments. While Smith acknowledged some difficulties in arriving at this belief solely on the basis of the moral sense and reason, he was convinced in the end that it was at least "strongly implied." This belief motivated the good to continue their virtuous living even though they could see no immediate benefits to themselves. Likewise it constrained the vicious.

> Among the principal symptoms and causes of that depravity, which generally precedes the ruin of states and empires, have justly been reckoned, by the wisest observers of human nature, contempt of religion, and disbelief of the future existence of the soul, and of those moral retributions which are always a necessary accompaniment of that doctrine.

The decline of the Roman republic, Smith reminded his readers, was accompanied by the spread of the Epicurean philosophy which held that the soul became extinct at death.[36]

Consistent with his belief about the universality of the moral sense in man and the uniformity of moral law, Smith at no point attempted to discuss the diversity of non-Christian religions and any consequent variation in their moral tendency. Religions were for him essentially equivalent to each other.

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[35] *Ibid*., 10-11.

[36] *Ibid*., 56.

While apprehensions of religion are at no time perfect and vary according to time and place, "when the customs, and manners and sentiments of different nations are explained with true philosophic candor, we shall find a striking uniformity of moral sentiment."[37] On these grounds Smith dismissed as a "pious conjecture" the notion that the variation of religion among different nations resulted from a more or less accurate tradition of an original revelation.[38]

While it was sentiments like this that was to bring Smith into conflict with more narrow-minded leaders of his denomination, he was too much the Presbyterian not to recognize the superiority of Christianity. In his understanding ancient philosophers found it necessary to spend a great deal of time discussing and teaching moral precepts because ceremonial religions placed little emphasis on this. The Romans introduced public censorship to maintain the purity of morals. Nevertheless, the religions they adhered to produced morals. The ancient legislators relied primarily on religion "to lay the foundations of society most securely" because "the rites with which the people continually approached its altars, impressed the public mind with a salutary reverence for those divine powers which were believed to preside over the world, and were avengers of crimes." But the "Christian religion" was superior to all of these because it "adds principle to ceremony, and instruction to the rites of devotion, and seizes on the soul by the double power of religious illumination, and religious awe."[39]

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[37] Ibid., I, 323-324.

[38] Ibid., 309.

At a number of points in his "system" Smith indicated that the general diffusion of Christianity in America made it unnecessary for him to elaborate particulars. In a discussion of social duties, for example, he said, "From the general information which prevails in a country like ours, continually enlightened by the pulpit on the practical duties of society, it would be wholly unnecessary, in this place, to go into an extensive detail of our social offices."[40] Throughout the work Smith diligently attempted to rely on the evidence of the moral sense and reason. But since he thought that there was no difference between true science and true religion he felt it useless to expand what was well known and accepted on the basis of revelation.

One instance of this was his treatment of those "essential parts of a rational worship" which were "so generally understood as not to require any further illustration." Smith felt, however, that two plausible objections against the duty of divine worship in general required some attention. In meeting these objections Smith shed more light on the connection of religion and morality, and the consequent effect on providence. The first objection was that it was an unworthy idea of God to believe that he received pleasure from hearing his own "praises extolled by mortals," or from listening to "humiliating confessions" from persons whose errors were already known and for whom God already had pity. Smith answered this objection by saying that it was a "law of our nature" to express strong affections and that repeated expression strengthened them. The "infinite mind" did not require worship for his own "gratification" but for "its own essential rectitude, and for its own beneficial influence in cultivating in the human heart the affections and habits of virtue and piety for which it is so admirably suited." Thus worship should not be looked at from the point of view of what it does for God, but rather what it does for man. Adoration of the divine perfections elevated the tone of moral feelings. Gratitude and thanksgiving confirmed "the affectionate purposes of duty and obedience to him." Confession armed "the soul against its own weakness, and its unholy passions." Supplication reminded man of his dependence on God and awoke the "profoundest sentiments of piety."[41]

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[39] Ibid., II, 95, 227, 314.

[40] Ibid., 112-113. Cf. 95, 107, 142.

The second objection Smith found more plausible. If, ran the argument, the "eternal train of causes and effects" have been fixed from the beginning, of what value was prayer.

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[41] *Ibid.*, 107-109.

The difficulty Smith had with this objection was that he agreed with the conditional clause. Earlier in the same chapter he had maintained that "divine providence . . . proceeds on fixed and invariable laws." Sometimes man failed to understand the regular order of events and their causes and described certain events as "extraordinary interpositions of Heaven." "Such fancies," declared Smith, "do no honor either to religion or philosophy." The universal government of providence was not "liable to be disarranged according to the exigencies and desires of men."[42] While agreeing with the grounds of the objection, Smith explained that prayer was still useful "to cultivate the moral qualities of the heart, and thereby obtain those spiritual blessings which, in the order of providence, are connected with them." In the natural order of things, the physical world "has been created wholly in subserviency to the moral world," and physical effects could be brought about by moral causes. Therefore the moral qualities produced by prayer could result in the "natural and temporal goods which we solicit in prayer."[43]

Other than this vague assertion, Smith did not elaborate on the connection of moral causes and physical effects. This was especially noticeable in his treatment of tempests, droughts, epidemics, and earthquakes, which in the traditional doctrine of providence were considered as signs of God's anger. While these ills "serve to awaken enquiry, to exercise ingenuity, to encourage industry, to afford principles on which to ground a prudent foresight and precaution, and to promote the exercise of all the virtues," Smith did not reverse the order and declare them to be caused by a lack of virtue. Smith had no sympathy for a "providence of expedients" or laws of nature that "change their operation according to the desires of men."[44] In this he had moved a long way from his father, Robert Smith of Pequea, who had seen God as actively involved in the American Revolution on the side of the "highly favoured Americans."[45] That dynamic God, in the hands of Robert's son, had become a static creator who confined himself strictly within the limits of natural law.

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[42] Ibid., 99.

[43] Ibid., 110-111.

Since providence did not bend to the will of man, in order for religion adequately to provide for the nation's prosperity and happiness its teachings had to be widely diffused for a long enough time to embue the national character with morality. It was the national character, Smith believed, that determined national prosperity and that character could not easily be changed, nor should an abrupt change be attempted. Legislators ought always to have an understanding of the national "spirit" which was produced by "a variety of concurring circumstances, continuing to operate upon a nation for a long time." The morals and manners which were included in this national character ought to be respected and rulers should "never attempt too directly to contradict them, or too violently to change them." To the conservative Smith it was better to endure certain evils than "to hazard a convulsion." There was no room in Smith's thinking for revolution. The best way to effect change was to provide public education, which for Smith meant "the general information of the citizens in the principles of virtue and good morals."[46] Smith's confidence in education was demonstrated in his remark that "by education skillfully applied, the manners, habits, and sentiments of youth may be formed to almost any standard."[47]

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[44] Ibid., 24.

[45] Robert Smith, The Obligations of the Confederate States of North America to Praise God (Philadelphia, 1782), p. 4.

Smith vacillated between the family and the state as the proper agency for providing this education.[48] The inconsistency at this point does not obscure his primary concern. He thought that in order for a state to prosper, the principles of religion and morality must be handed down from one generation to another, thus creating and sustaining a virtuous national character that would in turn insure national prosperity. Looking at it from the point of view of the family, Smith saw the principle in the fifth commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land."

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[46] Smith, Moral and Political Philosophy, II, 300-305.

[47] Ibid., 146. While Smith said at one point that "there is no exercise of the human faculties more favorable to virtue, than the humble, patient, and diligent cultivation of the intellectual powers," he thought of education primarily in the moral sense. Pursuit of the liberal arts was only for those who had "inclination and Leisure to pursue them." Ibid., 77, 306.

[48] Ibid., 142-158, 226, 305.

> This precept and promise is evidently addressed to Israel as a community; and is founded upon the universal moral order of providence established over the world. Virtuous and well governed families form the basis of public order. A dutiful offspring moulded under an excellent parental education, will, in their purity, hand down the civil and religious institutions of the republic to the following race, and transmit, with the same care, the public manners uncorrupted. Thus does filial duty become the sure foundation of the public virtue, and, with it, of the stability and prosperity of the nation.[49]

This emphasis on moral and religious education as a national necessity was to form a strong element of the Presbyterian message for the new nation.

Smith's conception of the connection between religion and national prosperity depend upon these various parts of his system. Only religion, through its emphasis on a future existence and through the natural tendencies of worship, could produce the morality which was essential to national survival and happiness. Smith accepted the worship and teaching of the churches in America as sufficient and did not feel obliged to discuss further the nature of the morality necessary to that end. Since in the providential government of the world physical results stemmed from moral causes, nations received physical prosperity on the basis of the virtuousness of their national character. Virtuous national character could only be created and sustained by constant and widely diffused religious and moral education.

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[49] Ibid., 156.

There were other elements in Smith's thought about the prosperity of nations that found their way into the developing idea of providence. The first appeared in a discussion of ways to increase population, which Smith considered an indication of national prosperity. In the presentation of an advanced economy based on agriculture and commerce, using money for transactions, featuring individual ownership of land, and flourishing under a system of government that secured the rights of individuals "whether consisting in the property of the soil, or in the free and entire use of the fruits of his own labor," Smith repeatedly referred to two moral principles that tended to increase population.[50] These were the related principles of industry and frugality. The government and economy that encouraged these would promote the greater population and thereby the greater national prosperity.

Industry for Smith was, like all moral qualities, of intrinsic value. In a different context, Smith sought to explain the presence of certain evils in the world on the basis that "the wants of man contribute to rouse that industry and habitual exertion of all his faculties of body and mind, on which their vigor and perfection depend." Industry was an essential part of man's nature. Since virtue was conformity to that nature, "The happiness, no less than the improvement of our nature, lies chiefly in constant and useful employment, stimulated by these necessary wants." Without these incentives to industry, man would degenerate into "a lazy, torpid, and vicious animal."[51] Smith was convinced that one of the most important duties of parents of the lower classes was to train their children in "habits of prudent industry" so that they would not become a "burden on society." In the "middling and superior classes" it was "still more necessary to awaken a generous ambition of becoming useful, or of rising to distinction in it by their virtues and their talents."[52]

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[50] *Ibid.*, 59.

The related principle of frugality was the opposite of luxury, ostentation, voluptuousness, and effeminacy and included simplicity and elegance. Luxury tended to waste the natural resources of a country and make it difficult to sustain a large population. It would not be too bad if luxury were confined to a small portion of the population but when it invaded "the body of the people," they tended to think of former luxuries as necessities and as a result delay or abstain from marriage and reproduction which would deprive them of such "necessities." Thus luxury inevitably discouraged a large population.[53]

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[51] *Ibid.*, I, 34-35.

[52] *Ibid.*, 146.

[53] *Ibid.*, 60-64.

The principle of frugality did not oppose the acquisition of wealth but controlled the use of it. The emphasis on industry demanded remunerative labor and Smith found commerce the most beneficial pursuit because "in the midst of wealth, and a certain magnificence which accompanies it, (commerce) is always frugal."[54] Smith found some difficulty in drawing the line between elegance and extravagance. He was certain that elegance required more than the "necessaries of life," and that a demand for "elegancies of art" tended to promote "new demands on industry," but he came up with no criteria to indicate when this had degenerated into "effeminacy and voluptuousness."[55] He was sure, however, that any wealth not gained by industry was bad. Smith contended that when "regular industry is no longer requisite in its acquisition, we see only a tasteless ostentation planted by the side of poverty and wretchedness, the unfailing symptoms of a declining population."[56] For this reason he favored heavy taxation on inherited wealth, but opposed sumptuary laws as restraints on industry.[57]

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[54] Ibid., II, 313.

[55] Ibid., I, 74.

[56] Ibid., 70.

[57] Ibid., II, 315-317. Smith also favored internal improvements and state magnificence in buildings, statues, and monuments, or "public magnificence with private simplicity."

When the principles of frugality and industry were combined with a system of government that encouraged them, national prosperity was the inevitable result. Even large scale war, natural calamities, or emigration could not diminish the population of a nation characterized by industry and frugality. "The true causes of a deficient, or declining population can only be found in the imperfection of the government, or the corruption of the public morals." Industry and frugality were intimately connected with morality and therefore religion. Smith felt that these virtues must be ingrained into the national character through religious instruction before the nation could prosper.[58]

The other element of Smith's thought that worked its way into the prevailing view of providence was "that the forms of civil government ought to be varied according to the character and manners of the people for whom they are designed."[59] It should be noted that Smith rejected the social-contract theory of government. In this he clearly demonstrated his independence from Witherspoon.[60] The social contract provided a leverage for revolution. Smith's whole system was designed to promote stability. In Smith's understanding civil government had grown out of domestic society and most political associations were "more the result of accident than design."[61] No single form of government was better than another. The important thing for national stability was that a government agree with the "manners" of the people. While his instruction on this matter became an important item in Presbyterian preaching, the ministers were more inclined to favor a republican form of government and so reversed Smith's dictum, holding that the "manners" of the people must agree with the form of government.

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[58] Ibid., I, 72-73.

[59] Ibid., II, 277.

[60] Cf. Witherspoon, Lectures, pp. 87-90.

There was a tension in Smith's thought between the idea that man possessed certain natural rights that ought to be protected against the encroachments of governments and the notion that governments were necessary to control the passions of man. The former was faithful to the teaching of Witherspoon; the later more integral to Smith's own thought. Smith favored "equal liberty" and believed that some political institutions were more favorable to that ideal than others, but that they could only be "prudently adopted" when the people had been previously prepared to receive such government. The freedom fostered by a democracy or a republic, both of which Smith used to refer to the United States, required a virtuous people. As long as a people remained virtuous their freedom was insured. "A well informed people, moulded [sic] in the habits of virtue, cannot easily be enslaved." But Smith held that if that virtue degenerated the government should exercise more control in order to insure national survival. "The state ought, in such case, if possible, to possess some means of revolving easily into another form of government."[62]

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[61] Smith, Moral and Political Philosophy, I, 86.

Within the framework of public "manners" Smith identified frugality, public spirit and respect for law as particular virtues requisite for the maintenance of a republic. Frugality has been discussed in another context and requires no further elaboration. Smith defined public spirit as "the general preference of the public, to private interest" which required "the love, and strong attachment of the people to the democracy itself."[63] In the discussion of public spirit Smith's distrust of the masses became obvious. They simply could not possess such unselfishness. "Universal suffrage," he argued, "is always dangerous . . . to the tranquility of the state." "The mass of the populace is necessarily ignorant" and would tend to "chuse [sic] men who are deeply tinctured with their own prejudices." The best way to insure that the electorate had public spirit was "to place the elective powers of the community in the hands of those who, by their property, have the most ample means of information, and the deepest interest in the public welfare."[64] As one would expect from Smith's emphasis on industry and frugality, there was a direct connection between wealth and virtue.

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[62] Ibid., II, 306, 313.

[63] Ibid., 280.

[64] Ibid., 291-299.

Even by restricting the franchise, however, there was no guarantee that the elected officials would have the interest of the public at heart, for factions (political parties), which Smith believed to be inevitably opposed to the general good, could arise. For this purpose it was wise to have a senate which was appointed rather than chosen in "popular elections." The resulting conflict of interest would "hardly leave them any other point of union but the public good."[65]

Smith considered public spirit or patriotism one of the chief virtues and saw it intimately connected with frugality and piety. He was sure that an irreligious man could never have the good of the society at heart and that "luxury, and genuine patriotism in the spirit of a country, are forever incompatible."[66] In his discussion of politics was the seed of an orthodoxy that was to feature patriotism and Christianity as inseparable. Even party politics, which denied the priority of religious considerations over political philosophy, was viewed as a danger to the favor of providence.

Finally Smith emphasized obedience to the laws of the nation as necessary to the continuance of republics. While this was an overriding concern throughout Smith's work, it came out most pointedly in connection with a discussion of the corruption of the principle of equality, the "spring" of democratic republics. All men were by nature equal, Smith believed, but in the course of time there appeared an inequality of property among citizens. As the fruits of industry, this property should be protected by law. "It is essential to the peace and prosperity of the state that property should be respected, that the citizens should be obedient to the laws, and should reverence the magistrate as their interpreter, and the organ of their justice."[67] If the people became envious of the rich and thwarted the authority of the law, or if political demogogues stirred up the passions of the poor against the rich, all respect for the law would disappear and corruption and anarchy follow. The result would be that "popular favorites starting up, and aiming to enslave the people by means of the people themselves, they are all, at length, superceded by one more fortunate than the rest; who becomes the tyrant of a new dynasty.--Thus perished the liberty of Rome."[68]

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[65] Ibid., 293.

[66] Ibid., 280, 313.

In the context of Smith's moral philosophy the evolution of the Presbyterian concept of providence can be appreciated. In his own preaching Smith synthesized all of his conclusions from reason with his interpretation of revelation, and presented this as God's word for the new nation. While this could be seen in a number of his sermons,[69] the fullest treatment appeared in "Religion Necessary to National Prosperity." Having treated his philosophy at some length, it is sufficient here to quote several passages from this sermon to illustrate how the philosophy entered the stream of revelation in the doctrine of providence. The text of the sermon was Exodus 20:5-6, "I the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy to thousands of those that love me and keep my commandments."

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[67] Ibid., 310.

[68] Ibid., 308-312.

> The immediate government exercised by God over the people of Israel, was the visible model of that secret Providence which presides over all the nations of the earth. The text discloses one of the most certain and invariable rules according to which the divine administration is conducted; which is, that the prevalence of virtuous manners among any people, and their respect to the institutions of religion, is usually connected with national prosperity; and on the other hand that impiety, and a general dissolution of the public manners prepares the way for a succession of national calamities, which are followed, at length, by some disastrous and fatal revolution.
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> . . . .
>
> When a nation has abandoned religion, the firmest basis of civil government is dissolved. Voluptuousness and effeminacy, avarice and prodigality, a restless ambition, dark treacheries, and a universal disregard of justice, which are the natural consequences of a general impiety, accumulate every species of misery on a wretched people, forsaken of God, and lost to virtue. . . . Such is the course of divine Providence over the great communities of the world.
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[69] See Samuel Stanhope Smith, The Divine Goodness to the United States of America (Philadelphia, 1795); A Discourse on the Nature and Reasonableness of Fasting (Philadelphia, 1795); Sermons of Samuel Stanhope Smith (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1821), I, 19-38, 51-66.

It is a principle immutably ingrafted into the system of nature. And the language of the text points to a fact in the moral order of the universe, and in the conduct of Divine Providence over the nations, acknowledged by all wise and good men, and verified by the whole history of the world.

. . . .

Where have we seen a people, under the full influence of religious and moral principle, in the full vigor of frugal and virtuous habits, which has fallen a prey to internal disorders, or to foreign domination?

. . . .

The belief of the principles of religion, and the practice of its duties, under some form which is calculated profoundly to impress the public mind with the sentiment of God, and the righteous government of his Providence over human affairs, is essential to the prosperity of nations.

. . . .

The necessity of religion to the interests of civil society arises out of the necessity of morals.

. . . .

Religion assumes the laws already existing, and recognizing the authority from which they emanate, enjoins obedience to them. . . . With silent majesty she presides over the peace of the republic, with an influence infinitely more powerful than that of the laws themselves. . . . If there is no moral law, no judge, no future state of being, why should we not devour the present moment which alone is ours? . . . Why should the poor man permit the rich to enjoy unmolested all the benefits of society?

. . . .

From every view which we can take of the subject, this conclusion continually meets us, that religion is absolutely necessary to the peace, the order, the solid interests, the durable prosperity of a nation. . . . On that people the blessing of God will rest among whom religion continues to maintain its practical influence. He has so laid the plan of divine Providence.

. . . .

But, when the ties of religion are once broken from the mind . . . public sentiment is absorbed in private interest--public virtue is lost. Sensuality insulates every citizen; he has no country but self; all the energies of patriotism are enfeebled.

. . . .

He has so laid the plan of his providence over the world, that the course of nature shall avenge the violated majesty of his law, and become itself, the minister of his justice.

. . . .

> A wise and virtuous education is the only true ground of filial duty, and filial duty is the genuine principle of all the domestic virtues. By such a discipline, religion, and good morals will continue to be handed down from race to race: and the state, strong in the virtue of its citizens and purity and innocence of the public manners, will continue to flourish for ages.[70]

Smith's emphasis on reason, his generous attitude toward all forms of religion, and his liberal educational policies brought him into conflict with more narrow-minded leaders of American Presbyterianism. As early as 1804 Smith was criticized for defending polygamy. It appears from his published work that he was seeking to defend the Old Testament patriarchs. His departure from accepted Presbyterian teaching nearly resulted in a trial before the General Assembly.[71] In 1808 Archibald Alexander raised questions openly before the General Assembly about the suitability of the college to train ministers. Under Witherspoon a trend had started toward the training of statesmen as well as ministers. Under Smith the process of secularization had spread to the point that some men were allowed to pursue only physical sciences, although they could obtain no degree.[72] Alexander believed this to be detrimental to the training of ministers, which had been the original purpose of the institution.[73] In the same year Ashbel Green began to question the orthodoxy of Smith's sermons. This combination of events, together with the excessive disciplinary problems of the college, foreshadowed both the retirement of Smith and the erection of a theological seminary to replace the college as the primary center for training Presbyterian ministers. In 1810 the trustees of the college, led by Samuel Miller and Green, set up an inquisitorial committee of visitors to replace Smith as head disciplinarian and attempted to find some one else to teach theology. Two years later, in the same year Princeton Theological Seminary opened, the trustees secured Smith's resignation, probably through the use of some sort of pressure.[74]

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[70] Smith, _Sermons_, II, 314-336.

[71] For Smith's position see his _Moral and Political Philosophy_, II, 120. William H. Hudnut, III, "Samuel Stanhope Smith: Enlightened Conservative," _Journal of the History of Ideas_, XVII (October, 1956), 546.

[72] For Smith's awareness of the role of the college in training statesmen, see Samuel Stanhope Smith, _On the Love of Praise_ (New Brunswick, 1810), pp. 25-26, 29.

While it is easy to see how the orthodox Presbyterian ministers could disown a leader who so nearly approached the position of the "infidel" deists, Smith can not easily be ignored in the story of American Presbyterianism. The irony is that the majority of the Presbyterian clergy of the early national period reflected to a large extent the thought of this discredited leader. It would be fruitless to weigh the relative influence of Witherspoon and Smith. Without Witherspoon there never would have been a Smith resembling Samuel. These men should be viewed, rather, as teacher and protege, and evaluated in that light. It is safe to say, in any case, that Witherspoon has been accorded the lion's share of credit while his son-in-law has been largely overlooked. Witherspoon was president of the College of New Jersey from 1768 to 1794. Much of the time was spent in affairs of state and during his last years he was blind. Smith moved into the president's house on campus in 1779 when he assumed the important chair of Moral Philosophy and lived there until 1812--a total of thirty-three years. Most of the time between 1779 and 1795, before he became president, he carried the responsibility of the office without bearing the title. His own lectures in moral philosophy replaced Witherspoon's as the basic text, and they too were copied by hundreds of students long before they appeared in print.[75] Thirty-three years devoted to molding the minds of Presbyterian ministers could not be eradicated with a resignation. Smith's faith in the power of education to form the minds of youth to almost any standard was in a sense vindicated in his own career. The very men most responsible for his departure from active life displayed the imprint of his teaching.

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[73] Archibald Alexander, A Sermon Delivered at the Opening of the General Assembly . . . 1808 (Philadelphia, 1808), p. 25.

[74] Hudnut, "Samuel Stanhope Smith," pp. 551-552.

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[75] James Carnahan, ed., The Autobiography and Ministerial Life of the Rev. John Johnston (New York, 1856), p. 28.

III

The doctrine of providence that emerged in Presbyterian pulpits after 1800 held in tension the dynamic God of revolutionary America and the God of the Witherspoon-Smith legacy self-confined by the operation of natural laws. The inherited concept of God who controlled human events at his pleasure and according to a plan not entirely known to man was too strong to completely succumb to the idea of God in the thought of Smith. The idea of a dynamic God persevered, however, more as a rhetorical premise which was neither necessary nor consistent with the content of the thought on providence. The latter followed the moral philosophy of Witherspoon and Smith and was taken to be an authentic interpretation of Scripture. While preached with the authority reserved for revealed truth, the notion that the doctrine could be proven from man's experience in history was maintained, and the doctrine was set forward as truth to be received on both counts.

An illustration of the difference between the rhetorical framework and content is a thanksgiving sermon delivered by George S. Boardman in 1823. At the outset Boardman proclaimed that "Nations prosper as He (God) wills," but in the body of the sermon he made it clear that national destruction always followed national degeneration. In defending a favorite text for the doctrine of providence, "Righteousness exalteth a nation," Boardman declared, "This truth is proclaimed by history, as well as the Bible." The core of the doctrine of providence was that "Nations have uniformly become corrupt, before they were destroyed. Religion, is as essential to the prosperity and perpetuity of nations, as intelligence." If these were "the basis, upon which God erects the superstructure of human happiness," Boardman made it perfectly clear that man rather than God was the decisive actor.[76]

More reflective ministers were aware of the tension between statements about the free activity of God and those indicating that national prosperity or punishment came as a result of the working out of natural laws, and correspondingly, attempted to harmonize the two. Ashbel Green as a young pastor in Philadelphia reflected this position in a sermon, *Obedience to the Laws of God, the Sure and Indispensable Defence of Nations*. Having developed the doctrine of providence at some length, Green added the following remarks.

> Perhaps some will now be ready to remark, that the prosperity which it must be confessed, accompanies a national observance of the divine laws is owing to the *natural influence* which religious and moral observances have to produce this desirable effect. Be it so; this influence I do not deny, but maintain. But remember, that this natural connexion between piety and prosperity, vice and ruin, is still the

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[76] George S. Boardman, *A Sermon . . .* (Sacket's Harbor, New York, 1824), pp. 5, 11-12. Cf. Joseph Clark, *A Sermon . . .* (New Brunswick, 1812); Daniel Dana, *An Election Sermon . . .* (Concord, 1823); George Bush, *Lack of Vision the Ruin of the People* (Indianapolis, 1826); William Linn, *A Discourse on National Sins* (New York, 1798); James Muir, *A Sermon . . .* (Philadelphia, 1798).

> appointment of God, and even, on this plan, is as much his order as if it had been made for every particular case, in which its effects are felt.[77]

Almost as an afterthought Green added, "Scripture and experience, however, do, I think, concur in teaching, that _beside_ this natural connexion, God does often and especially _interfere_ by his providence, both to preserve and bless those who obey him, and to destroy those who reject and despise his laws."[78] The cautious way in which Green approached this statement indicated the uneasiness with which the concept of God's interference in the order of nature remained in the doctrine of providence. This statement was in fact inconsistent with the whole of Green's sermon, for he had already informed the congregation that the "miraculous exertion of (God's) power" was no longer necessary in the government of the world. Green explained that God used miracle in the early days of man's existence to preserve or destroy nations because man had not yet had sufficient time to understand God's method of governing the world. In using miracles to save those nations that served him, or to destroy those that did not, God furnished examples for the instruction of those who followed. In the present, "abundant experience has shewn what is the settled order of the divine dispensation" so that "miracle is not to be expected, because it is not necessary."[79]

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[77] (Philadelphia, 1798), pp. 39-40.

[78] _Ibid._, p. 40.

Since the natural law could be easily interpreted as "nothing but God himself working in a regular and established mode,"[80] the emerging idea of providence created no difficulties for those social and political events, with which Green was concerned, that could be interpreted to fit the doctrine. But famine, pestilence, earthquakes and the like did not come in this category. In colonial America such phenomena had played a significant role in the doctrine of providence, invariably being construed as indicators of God's anger. According to the new understanding of providence, these items either had to be taken into account separately or dropped from consideration. James Wilson, for example, developed the doctrine of providence as it related to the prosperity of nations and concluded that "no immediate divine agency" was required to punish the wicked because "this proceeds according to the settled course of moral law." But when Wilson, a graduate of the College of New Jersey, entertained ideas of natural catastrophe, he was forced to contradict himself.

> The fact under consideration leads us to contemplate this other important truth, which is matter of pure revelation; that the moral laws, of themselves, are not sufficient to restrain or punish the wickedness of man while living in society on earth; and that God, whose purposes cannot be defeated,

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[79] Ibid., p. 19.

[80] John B. Romeyn, Sermons (2 vols.; New York, 1816), II, 313.

> will employ the most effectual means to accomplish them. This accounts for wars, famines, pestilential diseases, and all the long train of calamities which so afflict our race.[81]

Samuel Miller, who is best remembered as professor of church history at Princeton Theological Seminary, faced the problem of interpreting the doctrine of providence as a young minister in New York when over two thousand residents of the city died with yellow fever in just over a hundred days in 1798. Earlier that year Miller had developed the doctrine in a fast day sermon. He pointed out that the judgments of providence could be either "the ordinary operation of what are called natural laws," or the "result of more immediate and supernatural interference" but that "God is to be equally acknowledged as the author of both." The content of the sermon, however, was primarily of the political nature by then common in sermons based on the doctrine of providence, and Miller emphasized solely the natural law arguments.[82] After the epidemic of yellow fever, Miller again went before his congregation with a providential interpretation. But the principle of natural law as a way of understanding providence had become too strong in Miller for him to designate the passing of the pestilence as the "more immediate and supernatural interference" of God. With some difficulty,

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[81] James Wilson, The Utility of the Scriptures of the Old Testament (Alexandria, 1798), pp. 16, 22.

[82] Samuel Miller, A Sermon . . . (New York, 1798), pp. 23-26.

Miller maintained the coincidence of natural causes with providence.

> Let none say, that placing moral reformation among the principal preventives of future calamities similar to that which we have lately sustained, is discarding the agency of second causes. I would by no means be understood to do this. God, no doubt, in general, acts, both in the natural and moral world, through the instrumentality of means. But is it inconsistent with this acknowledgment to believe, that He disposes natural means in such a manner as to accomplish moral purposes?[83]

The tension in the doctrine of providence between natural law and the extraordinary activity of God which was evident in the 1790's was symptomatic of transition in the conception of that doctrine. As the doctrine developed further in the direction of natural law the tension was largely removed by a parallel transition in content. The acts of nature became decidedly secondary to those political and social themes developed in the moral philosophy of Witherspoon and Smith. The recurring epidemics of yellow fever, storms of unusual violence, destruction of crops by insects and similar events were absorbed to a large extent through another element of Presbyterian thought, the millennium.

The response to a fire in the Richmond theater in 1812, which resulted in the death of a number of the state's leading citizens, illustrates this transition. The theater was uniformly condemned by Presbyterians, and this catastrophe would seem to have offered a perfect opportunity "to improve" the event by describing it as the judgment of providence. Yet, to an amazing degree, providence as a category of explanation was absent from the sermonic accounts of the event. The disaster was generally interpreted as one of the "signs" of the approaching millennium. Providence had by then become almost exclusively interpreted with reference to social and political events which could be construed as the operation of natural laws.[84]

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[83] Samuel Miller, A Sermon . . . (New York, 1799), pp. 22-25.

The subjects which became conventional in the explications of the doctrine of providence were those emphasized in the teaching of Witherspoon and Smith. The necessity of religion to morality and morality to the welfare of the nation formed a congenial framework for the Presbyterians to make their demands on the nation. In this context the Presbyterians emphasized the necessity of Christian rulers, wholesome laws, and obedient citizens. The phrases "national character," "public manners" and "industry and frugality" became the stock ingredients of sermons on providence.

Since the more political themes will be discussed at length in Chapter II, the incorporation of the teaching of Witherspoon and Smith into the doctrine of providence can be illustrated here through the concepts of "industry and frugality." In the period from the Embargo of 1807 through the War of 1812, Presbyterian fast day sermons, which were largely devoted to the theme of providence, frequently listed "extravagance" and its synonyms as one of the grave sins that would either be corrected or would lead to national ruin. Although pronounced in the tone of orthodox theology, the language was more reminiscent of Smith's moral philosophy than the Bible.

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[84] See Samuel Miller, A Sermon . . . (New York, 1812); Samuel Fisher, Two Sermons . . . (Morristown, New Jersey, 1814); James Muir, Ten Sermons (Alexandria, 1812), pp. 15-20; James Muir, Repentance, or Richmond in Tears (n.p., n.d.). Muir lists all the printed sermons on the event and gives a brief characterization of each.

In 1807 the General Assembly complained of "the prevalent inordinate attachment . . . to things."[85] The fast day proclaimed by the Assembly on that occasion brought forth a plethora of statements on this theme. That of James Inglis of Baltimore was representative.

> Is it not evident that there is a spirit abroad not more hostile to the purity and simplicity of our holy Religion than to the genius of our Republican constitutions? A spirit of Luxury and Dissipation--pomp and fastidiousness--profusion and voluptuousness--prodigality and debauchery--revelling and wantonness--pride and ambition?[86]

The same concern was prominent in the sermons preached on the fast day just before the beginning of the War of 1812. Joseph Clark, who framed his sermon with talk of a covenant God but followed Smith's teaching point for point in the body, listed "idleness and extravagance" as one of the major "abominations" of the nation. He spoke of "the lamentable departure of those industrious, sober habits, frugal and simple manners, so favorable to morals and religion" and the contemporary rage for "those dissipations which corrupt the mind, (and) unhinge the moral order of society."[87] Stephen Rowan, pastor of the Eighth Presbyterian Church in New York and later moderator of the General Assembly, affirmed that one of the most obvious sins for which the nation was suffering the affliction of providence was "luxury and extravagance . . . , debauchery and intemperance."[88] At the close of the war, John Latta of Delaware was convinced that one of the blessings of the war was that it "checked unbounded luxury and extravagance" and the "onslought of effeminacy which would have ruined the country."[89]

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[85] Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Minutes of the General Assembly (Philadelphia, n.d.), I, 485. Hereafter MGA.

[86] James Inglis, A Sermon . . . (Baltimore, 1808), p. 10.

But the emphasis on frugality and industry was not limited to prosperity alone. In 1819 the General Assembly adopted a statement concerning recent "commercial embarrassments" in the United States and sent it to all major newspapers for publication. The financial crisis was not merely the result of poor economics, in the view of the commissioners, but of poor religion. They gave it as their opinion that,

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[87] Clark, _A Sermon . . ._ (1812), p. 11.

[88] Stephen N. Rowan, _The Sin and Danger of Insensibility Under the Calls of God to Repentance_ (New York, 1812), p. 18.

[89] John E. Latta, _A Sermon . . ._ (Wilmington, 1815), p. 18.

> they have no hope that general prosperity can be restored to our country, until there is a return to those habits of industry, temperance, moderation, economy, and general virtue, which our common Christianity inculcates.
>
> Under these impressions the Assembly would earnestly exhort the churches under their care, to take into due consideration the opinions above expressed; to cultivate in themselves, and to endeavour to promote in others, those simple, frugal, and regular pursuits, which cannot fail to exert a most benign influence on the best interests of society; and to train up their children in those principles and habits which will prepare them at once to be useful members of the Church and useful citizens. . . . And the Assembly would also earnestly exhort all the ministers in their communion to . . . impose on the minds of their hearers the all important truth, that the religion of Jesus Christ, in its vital power and practical influence, is the best friend of civil society, as well as essential to the eternal well-being of man.[90]

The growth of cities and the increasing number of poor people that inhabited them made it clear to the Presbyterians that the lack of "industry" rather than "frugality" was the real source of national danger. Since "industry" was a part of religious instruction, it was believed that poverty was the result of inadequate religious training. According to Archibald Alexander, first professor of Princeton Seminary, the poor,

> need religious instruction more than others, because their time is commonly completely occupied and their education defective. . . . Experience has fully shown the inefficacy of legal provision for the poor. The true remedy can only be found in raising their character, by instilling into their minds sound religious instruction.[91]

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[90] MGA, I, 515-516.

[91] Archibald Alexander, The Pastoral Office (Philadelphia, 1834), p. 20.

Because certain sins were connected, in the Presbyterian mind, with poverty it was believed that its growth could alter the national character and bring providential ruin. As Alexander put it, "no evil is more threatening in free countries than the increase of pauperism." While the remedy was believed to be religion, Alexander lamented that "in most Protestant churches in our large cities, you see very few of the poorest of the people."[92] Thus "industry and frugality," which Smith had taught in connection with ways to increase population, had come to be part of "our common Christianity" and was inculcated through the doctrine of providence. Those other elements of moral philosophy which entered providence will be discussed in Chapter II.

The emerging doctrine of providence not only provided a congenial ideology for American Presbyterians, but also became functional in a way that would have been impossible for the older version. This interpretation of God's government of nations maintained the idea of the solidarity of national experience before God without the embarrassment of preaching a covenant to a pluralistic nation that was "too big, too sprawling, too amorphous," to consider itself "somehow all caught up within a special and particular bond" with God.[93] In early nineteenth century America the natural law, applicable to all nations and proven by the whole history of the world, was more easily proclaimed as truth. Whether the nation believed or not, the church knew the secret of national prosperity and, if for no other reason, should retain a dominant position within the society.

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[92] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[93] Miller, "Covenant to Revival," p. 354.

In this vein the Presbyterians met the most serious intellectual challenge to the position of the church in society. The deists, led by Thomas Paine and Elihu Palmer, had attacked revealed religion and its clergy as opponents of equalitarian and republican principles and had urged deism, natural religion, as the basis for a "pure and unadulterated morality."[94] The Presbyterians, whose own approach was closer to deism than they realized, refused to consider deism even as religion and thus presented a caricature of deism as an attempt to separate morality from religion. Then they adopted the arguments that Smith had presented for the necessity of religion and made it apply solely to Christianity. With these adjustments in logic they attacked deism as unsupported by human experience or reason as well as revelation.

Ashbel Green's tirade is illustrative.

> This is a mere Atheistical hypothesis and speculation, not only unsupported by any experience, but in direct hostility, as we have seen with the experience of all nations, in all ages of the world. It is one of the most daring, extravagant, and unaccountable chimeras, that ever entered the head even of a metaphysical infidel. . . . They endeavour to give it currence by professing to separate religion from morality, and to

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[94] Herbert M. Morais, Deism in the Eighteenth Century America (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960), p. 128. See pp. 120-230 for an account of militant deism.

> be advocates for discarding the former, and warm contenders for retaining the latter. But that morals can exist without religion, is as destitute of proof and probability, as the whole position is without this qualification. No nation has ever yet existed where this phenomenon of morals without religion has made its appearance; and there is no reason to believe that it is even possible from the very nature and structure of the human mind.[95]

On the other hand, the proposition that "obedience to the divine laws . . . will insure to a nation the protection and blessing of heaven" could be "incontrovertibly supported by fact." There was no need to rely on Scripture for proof because there was sufficient evidence "of the historical kind." In the end Green was convinced that "the doctrine (providence) which I proposed to demonstrate has been shown to be supported by facts, and to be sanctioned by the soundest principles of reason.--It has been proved _to be true_; and _how_, and _why_, it is true, has been explained."[96] While the deists did not succumb to this logic, it was after all an age of reason and this approach to providence commanded a certain intellectual respectability within American society.

A further function of this doctrine of providence was that, once the doctrine was accepted, the only true patriot was the sincere Christian. The result was a perfect blending of nationalism with christianity. Although few persons explained the connection between the two, the phrase "Christians and patriots" occurred innumerable times in the

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[95] Green, _Obedience to the Laws of God_, pp. 45-46.

[96] _Ibid_., pp. 7-8, 21, 44-45.

Presbyterian literature of the time. Smith preached a whole sermon in which he tried to answer those who had "ignorantly objected" to Christianity because it did not inculcate patriotism. He concluded that while it was not in the New Testament because it would have been "pernicious" in that historical situation, it was everywhere in the Old Testament and congenial to the spirit of benevolence in the New. Patriotism was in fact "the sublimest impulse of our nature," and only the religious man could be patriotic.[97] As Samuel Miller put it, Christians "are emphatically the STRENGTH and GLORY of a nation."[98] In this light, it is not surprising to find the General Assembly making missionary appeals to those "who, as patriotic citizens, regard the prosperity of their country," for they would naturally "be anxious to diffuse the principles of the gospel, so favourable to that prosperity."[99]

The teaching of Witherspoon and Smith had radically altered the doctrine of providence. While attempting to retain the framework of orthodox Calvinism, Presbyterians moved under their influence toward the more static concept of providential government through a natural law of retribution. In this context the entire range of religious, moral, economic and political phenomena that had been taught by Witherspoon and Smith in moral philosophy came to be articles of religious dogma, the belief and practice of which were thought to be essential to the welfare of the nation.

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[97] Smith, Sermons, II, 20, 25, 35.

[98] Memoirs of John Rodgers (New York, 1813), p. 359.

[99] MGA, I, 74-75.

CHAPTER II

PROVIDENCE AND LIBERTY: THE AMERICAN COROLLARY

The logical conclusion from the doctrine of providence of the Witherspoon-Smith tradition was that the civil government of any nation could best secure its own prosperity and longevity by supporting religion. The old world solution had been an established religion. But America had secured in the Revolution certain "civil and religious liberties" which were as valued by American Presbyterians as the existence of the nation itself. The Presbyterians were caught in the dilemma of trying to preserve both the providential benefits which could be most easily achieved through an established religion and America's special liberties. Since the Presbyterians understood religious liberty as a Protestant religious dogma rather than as an absolute civil right, theoretically this could have been done by a plural and equal establishment of the Protestant denominations. This solution, however, raised insurmountable problems at the point of implementation. By the time the idea of any formal establishment on a national basis was rejected by the adoption of the First Amendment, the Presbyterians on the whole acquiesced in and supported this decision. The Presbyterian idea of religious liberty, however, coalesced with the doctrine of providence to form what may be called the American Corollary of providence. The American Corollary posited that while religion was to be free from the control of civil government, America as a nation would have to adhere to Protestant Christianity if it were to prosper and perpetuate its free institutions. This kind of informal establishment was described as an "association between Religion and Patriotism" and required the nation to give formal recognition of providence, elect Christian officials and enact laws consistent with divine law.

The essence of religious liberty for the Presbyterians was the freedom of each individual to interpret the Bible for himself, which was thought to encompass the Reformation doctrines of the authority of Scripture and the priesthood of all believers. Religious liberty thus defined was what they had fought for in the Revolution and what they believed to have been granted to them by providence. The Presbyterians also assumed this understanding to be an accurate description of the legal status of religious liberty in America after the adoption of the First Amendment. Eliphalet Nott, President of Union College, thus explained the American situation by declaring that "no assuming pontiff dictates to us our faith. . . . Here light without a veil emanates from the sun of righteousness, and salvation, without a mixture, flows pure and unrestrained from its sacred source--the gospel."[1] Or, as Asa Hillyer understood it, "Here, every one is permitted to think for himself, and to form his religious opinions according to the word of God, and the dictates of his own conscience."[2]

Religious liberty for the Presbyterians, then, was a concept with positive religious content rather than an abstract idea of freedom which was neutral to religion. The ordinary formula used in thanksgiving sermons of the era was an expression of gratitude for "civil and religious liberty," but the meaning was not different when James Richards substituted "our republican form of government and our spiritual privileges and hopes."[3] Thus it was no mistake but a common use of the term when Ezra Stiles Ely declared of prison inmates, "Civil liberty may be taken away, but God forbid that six hundred souls should be deprived of the _liberty of hearing the Gospel_!"[4]

While the majority of statements concerning religious liberty were made in this positive vein, occasionally a Presbyterian minister would explicitly point out that it could not be understood otherwise. In speaking of the necessity of "freedom of religion," John Holt Rice, at that time President of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, indicated that he wished to be fully understood. "When we speak of freedom of conscience . . . it cannot mean a right to have no conscience at all." It was not the "right to cast off all religious obligation, and live as we list" or the right to "set at nought the authority of God."

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[1] Eliphalet Nott, _Miscellaneous Works_ (Schenectady, New York, 1810), pp. 21-22.

[2] Asa Hillyer, _A Sermon . . ._ (Newark, 1823), p. 8.

[3] James Richards, _A Sermon . . ._ (Newark, 1823), p. 14.

[4] Ezra Stiles Ely, _A Sermon for the Rich to Buy, that They May Benefit Themselves and the Poor_ (New York, 1810), p. 21.

> But by freedom of conscience we mean, the unrestrained enjoyment, by one who feels his obligations to his gracious and almighty Maker, of the right to worship him according to his convictions of truth and duty; and to do whatever he may think incumbent on him, both in his individual and social capacity, for promoting piety and good will on earth: provided that in so doing, he interferes not with the rights of others.[5]

Something of this kind was no doubt what Romeyn had in mind when he declared, "No one is a more decided friend of religious liberty: but at the same time a more determined opponent of religious indifference, than I am."[6]

This understanding of religious liberty placed the Presbyterians in an awkward position during the discussions over disestablishment which occurred through the 1780's. The significant debate for Presbyterians, as with other Americans in the Middle and Southern states, came in Virginia. The Presbyterians were not opposed to the state's supporting and enforcing the practice of religion, but were exceedingly cautious about surrendering to the state any authority over

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[5] John Holt Rice, The Power of Truth and Love (Boston, 1828), pp. 12-13.

[6] Romeyn, Sermons, II, pp. 355-356.

Scripture and conscience. In the long run the Presbyterians were willing to forgo any financial or other benefits of establishment so that Scripture could occupy its proper place of authority.[7]

But disestablishment was not interpreted as a separation of church and state, or even that the state would remain neutral in its attitude toward religion. Rather religion was believed to have been freed from the control of state so that man could exercise the "unrestrained . . . enjoyment . . . of the right to worship." This understanding is only comprehensible in light of a fundamental Presbyterian presupposition of the era that "truth" or Scripture, unfettered by human law, possessed the power to claim the allegiance of all men. It was a common sentiment that "evangelical piety most abounds where the freedom of religion is most fully secured." An establishment was nothing but "an incubus on the bosom of the church, causing her life-blood to stagnate, and diffusing a benumbing influence through every member."[8] In the long run, rather than a separation of church and state, the Presbyterians believed that Christianity would have a greater impact on the common life of the nation than was possible with an establishment.[9] While a few New England

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[7] See the Appendix for a discussion of Presbyterian participation in the Virginia settlement.

[8] Rice, Power of Truth and Love, p. 12.

[9] For a discussion of this same point in a different context, see infra, pp. 119-121.

Presbyterians continued to support establishments,[10] the assessment of William Linn made in 1794 seems to be an accurate description of the attitude of Presbyterians in the Middle and Southern states. "In this country there are still a few advocates for establishments of some kind; but the most rejoice. . . ." But this characterization would have been incomplete and incorrect if Linn had not proceeded to say, "We believe that religion will flourish more than ever, and that the old establishments in Europe are a great impediment to its progress, and a part of the anti-christian system."[11]

Thus the Presbyterians viewed the religious settlement in America as a political victory for the Protestant concept of religious authority. This view was believed to have been embodied in the political institutions of the nation. While this view was common, few stated it so eloquently as Eliphalet Nott.

> In the worst of times, and however you may differ, with respect to men and measures, still cling to the constitution; CLING TO THE INTEGRITY OF THE UNION; cling to the institutions of your country. These, under God, are your political ARK of safety; the ark that contains the cradle of liberty, in which you were rocked; that preserves the vase of Protestant christianity, in which you were baptized, and that defends that sacred urn, where the ashes of your patriot fathers smoulder.[12]

Even when Presbyterians used Lockian or Enlightenment language to describe religious liberty they had in mind the affirmation of the Protestant religious article of faith rather than an abstract political or social right. The Presbytery of Hanover, for example, explained to the General Assembly of Virginia that the Assembly had no authority in matters of religion since "the only proper objects of civil governments are the happiness and protection of men in the present state of existence, the security of the life, liberty and property of the citizens." In order "to illustrate and confirm these assertions," however, the Presbytery cited religious principle rather than social contract. The Presbytery affirmed "that to judge for ourselves and to engage in the exercise of religion agreeable to the dictates of our own consciences is an unalienable right, which, upon the principles that the gospel was first propagated and the reformation from popery carried on, can never be transferred to another."[13]

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[10] See Dana, An Election Sermon, pp. 14-22; Samuel Taggart, God's Visitation of Sinful Nations (Greenfield, 1812), pp. 27-34.

[11] William Linn, Discourses on the Signs of the Times (New York, 1794), p. 23.

[12] Nott, Miscellaneous Works, p. 152.

Another illustration of this was the use of the section in the Westminster Confession called "Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience." In this seventeenth century document "Christian liberty" was defined as "freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law" and freedom from "bondage to Satan." In this context, it was affirmed that "God alone is Lord of the conscience." To believe anything "contrary to his word. . . . is to betray true liberty of conscience." In setting forth their intentions at the time of the reorganization in 1788, the Synod of New York and Philadelphia quoted this section of the Confession and concluded that "Therefore, they consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion as universal and unalienable."[14]

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[13] Memorial from the Presbytery of Hanover to the General Assembly of Virginia, June 3, 1777. Reproduced in Charles R. James, Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Virginia (Lynchburg, Virginia: J. P. Bell Company, 1900), p. 226.

The Presbyterian understanding of religious liberty was also in more basic harmony with that of the Puritan founders of America than with that of contemporary Enlightenment figures. As late as 1828 Edward Griffin, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Newark, could affirm that the earliest settlers of New England "came with unconquerable attachments to civil and religious liberty," without either being accused of misusing the language or of historical ignorance.[15] Even James Sabine, who felt in 1826 that the Congregationalists of Massachusetts exposed Presbyterians to "outrage and Persecution," defended the founders of New England as exponents of religious liberty. Sabine was convinced that if religious liberty were properly understood in America,

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[14] Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, The Constitution (Philadelphia, 1797), pp. 96-98, 371-372. Hereafter Constitution.

[15] Sermons of Edward D. Griffin, to Which Is Prefixed a Memoir of His Life, ed. William B. Sprague (2 vols.; New York, 1839), I, 166.

Christianity would soon prevail throughout the entire nation.[16] Gardiner Spring, pastor of the Brick Church in New York, declared that the early colonists "were not merely good men, but some of the best men the world has seen." A part of the New England heritage was "the spirit of discussion and inquiry," which Spring saw as the basis of religious liberty. His full meaning became clear when he asserted, "I ask no man to relinquish his opinions because they differ from mine, unless I can show him that they differ from the Bible."[17]

II

The fullest statement of the Presbyterian position on religious liberty was made by John Holt Rice in Historical and Philosophical Considerations on Religion.[18] In many ways Rice was admirably suited to this task. Although he was more active than reflective and often did not understand clearly the distinctions between his and other positions, he stated his own convictions unambiguously and without hesitation. Archibald Alexander, a lifelong friend, observed that even as a young man Rice abstained from philosophical and theological arguments and read little in these areas. The effect of this was, according to Alexander, that,

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[16] James Sabine, The Great Moral Duties of a Free and Independent People (Boston, 1826), pp. 11, 34, 40.

[17] Gardiner Spring, A Tribute to New England (New York, 1821), pp. 16-17, 35.

[18] Ed. by A. Converse (Richmond, 1832). These essays first appeared in serial form in a newspaper in 1830 and were published in book form after Rice's death. While this particular statement of his views came late, it was consistent with the sentiments he held and defended throughout his life.

> On some accounts, this was a disadvantage to him, as it rendered him less acute in minute discrimination, than he otherwise might have been; but on the other hand, it is probable, that this very circumstance had some influence in preparing him to seize the great and prominent points of a subject with a larger grasp, while the minor points were disregarded as unworthy of attention.[19]

This was certainly the case with Historical and Philosophical Considerations on Religion. Rice's lack of "minute discrimination" is seen in the dedication of this work to James Madison, "enlightened, and dignified friend of rational liberty." The purpose of the volume was to "shew how the freedom" that Madison had labored to win "may be perpetuated."[20] Although Madison would have been horrified at Rice's directions, Alexander, himself a master of the fine distinction, testified to Rice's ability "to seize the great and prominent points" by expressing his own agreement.[21]

After having argued that religious liberty was necessary before "true religion" could "produce its appropriate effects on the community," Rice sought to show how religious liberty could be perpetuated by inquiring into its history. Rice presupposed that religious liberty could be perpetuated by preserving those things which led to its initial acceptance. His historical interpretation was "that we owe all our ideas of religious liberty to the Bible." According to Rice, the early Christians were exponents of religious liberty and "every martyr . . . was a fearless advocate." After Constantine turned from his initial support of toleration the ideas of religious liberty were gradually lost except among the "Waldenses" and several reformers before Luther. The Reformation brought a renewal of emphasis on religious liberty. The basis of this, according to Rice, was a belief in "the sufficiency of the Scriptures; and the right of private judgment." "In all cases," Rice affirmed, "the men who stood forward as champions of religious liberty, derived their principles FROM THE BIBLE." This was so much the case, Rice believed, that one could discover "a remarkably exact proportion between zeal for freedom of conscience, and conformity of religious doctrine to the simple truths of the Bible."[22]

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[19] Quoted in William Maxwell, A Memoir of John H. Rice, First Professor of Christian Theology in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia (Philadelphia, 1835), p. 18.

[20] Rice, Religion, pp. 3-4.

[21] James W. Alexander, The Life of Archibald Alexander, First Professor in the Theological Seminary, at Princeton, New Jersey (New York, 1854), p. 481.

By relying on the power of the state the Reformers stopped short of their own principles "and the contest was brought to a close before the work was rendered complete." The work begun during the Reformation was completed in America. "The settlement of this country, chiefly by men, who fled from religious intolerance in the old world, was the most important event, except the Reformation, after the establishment of the *great spiritual tyranny*." While Rice admitted that the first settlers possessed something of "the spirit of their age" he believed them to be in advance of that age with regard to religious liberty. Prior to the American Revolution many Christians had resolved upon complete religious liberty and Rice contended that when the various states established governments, the "*forms of political government* were framed in conformity to principles received by the most numerous classes of christians among us." Rice alleged that the support for disestablishment among "infidels" was an attempt to secure the collapse of Christianity altogether. For Rice their participation could not have come under the category of a struggle for religious liberty because it would imply that that term could have a negative meaning which Rice did not allow. "By *religious freedom*," he asserted, "our modern reformers mean, *freedom from all religion*. And thus their liberty is the slavery of sin, and a state of war against the best principles of human virtue." Religious liberty for Rice was a religious concept and it could only come from the Bible.[23]

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[22] Rice, Religion, pp. 50-54.

When Rice turned to discuss means by which religious liberty could be preserved, the emphasis remained on the sufficiency of the Scriptures and the right of private judgment. He held as a cardinal principle that "FOR THE PRESERVATION OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE

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[23] *Ibid*., pp. 54-62, 73.

SCRIPTURES OUGHT TO BE ADMITTED: AND THE BIBLE TO BE UNIVERSALLY DISTRIBUTED," and this "does most clearly imply the *right of private judgment*." It is quite clear that Rice maintained this position in opposition to Catholicism. That there could be no religious freedom if laymen were forced to receive the opinions of priests was a proposition that Rice declared to be "considered as settled . . . among protestants." Thus to be "free" in this sense, it was imperative that every citizen possess a Bible. Referring to Madison again, Rice emphasized "*That the Bible is the most efficient support of that liberty, which his labors so materially aided, in procuring for the people of this country*."[24]

But Rice was not satisfied with this alone. Like all Presbyterians of his time, he considered the way the Bible was interpreted to be extremely important. Therefore he concluded that "*Correct views of christian doctrine; and especially the terms of a sinner's acceptance with his Maker, are all important for the preservation of religious liberty*." The central doctrine necessary to religious liberty Rice held to be justification by faith, which again illustrates the Protestant orientation of his whole concept of religious liberty. The doctrines of penance, extreme unction and purgatory he alleged to be "suited to extend priestly influence: and therefore to deny religious freedom.[25]

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[24] *Ibid*., pp. 74-79.

[25] *Ibid*., pp. 68-74.

Beyond this, Rice reflected his Calvinistic rootage by declaring that simplicity of worship was necessary to the preservation of religious liberty. Elegant temples, he believed, had been used to keep the mind in bondage and ignorance. Freedom of choice demanded knowledge and this could best be attained through a mode of worship which aimed at impressing truth on the mind rather than exciting the passions through ceremony.[26]

Rice applied the same principles to church polity and concluded that it was necessary for the "government of the church" to be "in the hands of the people." At this point Rice hedged by stating his position in a way that he thought would appeal to a majority of American Protestants. In a less public declaration, however, he declared unhesitatingly, "One reason of no small weight why I prefer the form of government of the Presbyterian church, is because the great principles laid down in the Gospel, are accurately drawn out, and reduced to practice with a precise application of all the checks and balances which give security to religious liberty." The "checks and balances" as he conceived them were the power of the church to regulate and discipline ministers, the representation of laymen in ecclesiastical judicatories, the power of the laity in the choice of a minister, the possession of the Scriptures by laymen which enabled them to judge the performance of the minister, and the marriage of ministers which gave them an interest in the common destiny of the community. For Rice the conclusion was inescapable that Presbyterianism was the best means of preserving religious liberty.[27]

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[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 65-68.

As to the best method of promoting adherence to these means of preserving religious liberty Rice was in agreement with Witherspoon and Smith. "*The prevalence of a sound, intellectual and religious education is to be regarded among the most important means of preserving our religious liberty*." Rice believed that anyone not instructed in the Scriptures and brought up under a system of moral education could easily fall prey to enthusiasm, fanaticism or superstition, all of which could lead to a loss of religious liberty in his understanding. Rice concluded that the Sunday School system, which was already flourishing, was an "efficient instrument in perpetuating the religious liberty of the United States."[28]

At this point Rice had reached the same conclusions with regard to religious liberty that Smith had with regard to the general prosperity of the nation. If the nation, if religious liberty as understood by the Presbyterians, were to be perpetuated in America it could be accomplished by nothing short of the domination in fact if not in law of Protestant, preferably Presbyterian, Christianity. The coming together of these two themes was apparent when Rice declared that "Parents and teachers of youth, are committing a species of treason against their country, by neglecting the moral and religious discipline of the young."[29]

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[27] John Holt Rice, *The Importance of the Gospel Ministry* (Richmond, 1817), pp. 8-9; *Religion*, pp. 79-88.

[28] Rice, *Religion*, pp. 89-97.

III

If religious liberty was understood by the Presbyterians of the Early National Period as the product of Protestant influence on society which demanded the dominance of Protestantism for its survival, no less was true of civil liberty. To a certain degree the concepts of civil and religious liberty were inseparable in the Presbyterian mind, except that religious liberty was understood as a prerequisite to civil liberty. The latter, like religious liberty, was not conceived of as a negation of authority but as a condition requiring responsible action, freely taken, for the good of the community. For Presbyterianism nothing could be considered as good for the community which did not include Christianity or flow from Christian teaching.

Gardiner Spring expressed the Presbyterian conception of liberty rather precisely.

> Liberty without godliness, is but another name for anarchy or despotism. Let philosophers and statesmen argue as they please--the religion of the gospel is the rock on which civil liberty rests. You have never

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[29] *Ibid*., p. 91.

> known of a people free without the Bible; with it, they cannot long be slave.[30]

Reflecting this point of view, James Muir, one of the most active Presbyterian ministers of the South, surveyed the American scene in 1798 and concluded that "Liberty, in our day, has been a name greatly abused, it has been the rallying point for anarchy and irreligion." If liberty could in any way be used against religion, Muir did not hesitate to affirm that he could not "recommend such a spirit in any manner, or to any degree."[31] The equally active New England Presbyterian, Daniel Dana, affirmed that "Liberty . . . is a blessing above all price," but declared his agreement with Muir when he added, "It is equally true, that the best things become, in their perversion, the worst." For Dana virtue was a precondition of liberty. "Could a licentious people preserve their own liberties, they would be a nuisance in the world. They would be the pests and corrupters of mankind. But they cannot preserve them."[32] Presbyterians then would have agreed with Elisha Swift that a "dangerous and fatal licentiousness" which served as a "pretext for demolishing all the safeguards of pure religion," was not liberty but a perversion of it.[33]

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[30] Gardiner Spring, Memoir of the Rev. Samuel J. Mills (New York, 1820), pp. 106-107.

[31] Muir, A Sermon . . . (1798), p. 11.

[32] Dana, An Election Sermon, p. 17.

[33] Elisha P. Swift, A Sermon . . . (Pittsburgh, 1825), p. 17.

This idea of liberty as something less than an absolute right unless accompanied by responsible Christian practice was best illustrated in the Presbyterian position of gradual emancipation for American Negro slaves. That slaves were not capable of becoming "freemen" until they had attained a Christian education was a common sentiment of Presbyterians prior to 1826 and one that was consistent with their total view of liberty.[34] Samuel Miller enunciated this point of view in a sermon before the Synod of New Jersey which was directed toward raising funds for the African School sponsored by that body. Miller declared, "One of the most serious obstacles to the immediate emancipation of slaves, in this or any other country, is that they are not prepared for the enjoyment of freedom." Only after they were "taught to read God's holy word" and "instructed in the doctrines and duties of our holy Religion" did Miller think that they could "possess the mental vigour and acuteness, the high sense of character, and the moral restraints and regularity of freemen." Miller believed that in their present "degraded" state the slaves could have nothing but a degrading influence on society. "They could never be trusted as faithful citizens." Christ alone could "prepare those who are in thraldom to be 'free, and not to use their liberty as a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of Jesus Christ.'"[35]

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[34] It was this position that was rejected by those Presbyterians who became advocates of immediate emancipation. See for example the "Records of the Synod of Indiana," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXXIV (December, 1956), 266-271.

That this idea was a segment of Miller's total view of the inner connection between liberty and Christianity is illustrated in his sermon, *Christianity the Grand Source, and the Surest Basis, of Political Liberty*. Taking as a text 2 Corinthians 3:17, "And where the spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty," Miller pointed out that the Scripture spoke of a different kind of liberty but that the text was equally applicable to political liberty. The major thesis of the sermon was "That the general prevalence of real Christianity, in any government, has a direct and immediate tendency to promote, and to confirm therein, political liberty." True liberty was not bound with any form of government but existed in the "hearts and dispositions" of citizens, and Miller believed that Christianity promoted the disposition to liberty. Christianity taught that all men were by nature equal so that "citizens, of every rank" were considered as brothers, even though their possession of power and rights be unequal. Christianity promoted the happiness of the community and taught its citizens not to "resign his conscience . . . to the capricious will of men."

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[35] Samuel Miller, *A Sermon . . .* (Trenton, 1823), pp. 7-9, 14, 21. While Miller held the same idea to be true of all men, and thus his outlook here was consistent with his total philosophy, there was an inconsistency in Miller's approach to slavery which should be pointed out. He favored colonization and one of the arguments he used to support that scheme was that the "Christianized" Negroes sent there would evangelize the continent of Africa. These supposedly were the same individuals who would have a degrading effect on American society.

Justice and benevolence, temperance and moderation were necessary to liberty and inculcated by Christianity. Christianity taught men the proper duties in all relations of life and rendered men "contented with those rights which the God of nature gave them." Appealing to history as his authority, Miller concluded that "with few exceptions . . . there never was a regularly organized government . . . where the true religion was not received, in which political slavery did not hold a gloomy reign."[36]

Miller came to the same conclusion Smith did when he considered providence, and Rice when he surveyed religious liberty. The best way to insure the continuance of political liberty in the United States was to insure the dominance of Christianity. "Those are the truest and the wisest patriots, who study to increase its (Christianity's) influence in society." If America wished to "stand fast in that liberty, wherewith the Governor of the universe" had made it free, it must remain Christian. And if political liberty were to continue in America, Christianity would have to be taught to the rising generations. "Teach them to be Christians and they will ever be free."[37]

Thus, from whatever angle the Presbyterians viewed America's past and future, the conclusions were the same.

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[36] Samuel Miller, *Christianity the Grand Source, and the Surest Basis, of Political Liberty* (New York, 1793), pp. 7-23.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

From the point of view of the doctrine of providence, America had come to be an independent and promising nation because her early settlers and colonists were dedicated to establishing a Christian society in the new land. If that prosperity were to continue it would be because of the continuing influence of Christianity. While this was believed to be a natural law binding on all nations, America's civil and religious liberty was something peculiar, something special. According to the Presbyterian interpretation of history, these too were products of Christianity and if the new nation were to preserve that which it held most dear it could only be done by the perpetuation of Protestant Christianity.

Liberty combined with the doctrine of providence at the point of Smith's teaching concerning republics. As John D. Blair of Virginia phrased this insight in defending the general proposition that virtue was necessary to national prosperity, "This, in a greater or lesser degree, is true of all nations; but to those which, like ours, are blessed with free republican forms of government, of which virtue is the leading principle, it is of the greater usefulness, and the most indispensable necessity."[38] The thought of liberty and providence interacted at this point so that the strands often became indistinguishable, resulting in the American Corollary.

Sometimes the statement of the American Corollary sounded like a recitation of the doctrine of providence with an emphasis on liberty. This was the case when John McKnight recommended to his congregation "such manners, and such modes of living, as become republicans and free men, and as will tend to preserve the liberty and privileges which you enjoy." Those things to avoid were "idleness, prodigality, dissipation, and luxury," since these were the "bane of republicanism and of liberty."[39] In other cases there was a greater incorporation of more traditional Christian instruction. Romeyn, who defined "righteousness" as adherence to "the whole system of revealed truth," announced to his congregation that

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[38] John D. Blair, Sermons (Richmond, 1825), p. 5.

> Where righteousness prevails, there civil freedom is enjoyed. I mean not that licentiousness for which irreligious theorists have pled, and which, under the imposing name of freedom, is the most galling and destructive despotism; but the freedom of law; a freedom which originates in efficient faith and sound literature; a faith and literature, the seed of which is only to be found in righteousness.[40]

In other cases the statement emphasized the practice of Christianity with only a hint of providence, as in the case of Jacob Janeway.

> Do we enjoy civil and religious liberty? To the Bible, which teaches magistrates how to rule, and the people how to obey, we owe this blessing. . . . Shut up the Bible; abolish our Christian assemblies for reading and preaching its sacred contents; and in a few years all

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[39] John McKnight, The Divine Goodness to the United States of America (New York, 1795), pp. 19-20.

[40] Romeyn, Sermons, I, 70, 81.

> these blessings would be lost. . . . Civil liberty would perish in the ruins of sound morality.[41]

In whatever way the American Corollary was stated, it always carried the message that America could preserve neither its existence as a nation or its special features of civil and religious liberty without adherence to Christianity.

In this way, the question of a formal establishment of religion in the old world sense had become irrelevant. The Presbyterians, while expressing full agreement with the American settlement called for an informal establishment based on public opinion rather than law. George Potts articulated the Presbyterian position in a sermon on July 4, 1826.

> To come therefore, immediately to the point of our remarks. When we assert, that genuine Religion, with all its moral influences, and all its awful sanctions, is the chief, if not the only security we can have, for the preservation of our free institutions,—we are prepared for the sneers of infidelity, and suspicions of our disinterestedness in regard to established religions, which we a short time since, avowed. We therefore avow once more our sincere convictions--(and we are speaking the sentiments of that part of Christ's church to which we are from principle attached,) we avow once more our sincere convictions, that an established union between church and state, ever has been and ever will be,--while man continues to be, what he now is,--the prolific parent of corruption in both church and state. What we intend by the position just now advanced, is briefly this. The preservation of our constitutional rights, from the very nature of our government, must be entirely dependent upon the sound character of public opinion--a source of powerful influence, far greater than that of fleets and armies:--the character of public opinion, again, will depend upon the kind and degree of religious and moral principles, operating upon the community: and finally we assert that the genuine effects of the religion of Christ, wherever it prevails,

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[41] Quoted in Bible Society of Philadelphia, Sixth Report (Philadelphia, 1814), p. 41.

> --we mean in its purity--are the dissemination of correct knowledge, not through one, but through all classes of society--a high tone of moral feeling,--and thus, additional strength to the bonds of interest, which hold society together.[42]

This informal establishment of Christianity as the basis of the national life through the power of public opinion Potts called "an association between Religion and Patriotism." When Potts, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Natchez, Mississippi, delivered this discourse in Philadelphia, he so well expressed the sentiments of the local Presbyterian clergy that the sermon was printed at their request and with their endorsement. The American Corollary demanded the "association between Religion and Patriotism."[43]

IV

While the "association between Religion and Patriotism" ultimately covered every phase of social and personal life, it had particular significance for the political life of the nation. In America public opinion, which indicated the state of the national character, was registered with every election. The "association" demanded at least three things of the American civil government. It was believed that the government should make explicit avowal of the providential government of God, that the officials of government should support Christianity by example and deed, and that civil law should reflect the natural or divine law as interpreted by the churches. All of these were considered acceptable and possible in the face of disestablishment and absolutely necessary if the nation were to prosper and perpetuate its liberties.

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[42] George Potts, An Address . . . (Philadelphia, 1826), pp. 31-32.

[43] Ibid., pp. 3, 12.

Presbyterians believed that it was essential that the nation recognize the existence of God and many also felt that the Bible should be explicitly recognized by the civil government as revealed truth. While the Presbyterians could rejoice in disestablishment, given the circumstances of the time, they did not think that this justified the failure to acknowledge the existence of God and his providential government in the national Constitution. Samuel Stanhope Smith viewed this as "an unreasonable jealousy" of religion.[44] Archibald Alexander rejoiced in the constitutional settlement with this single exception, which he claimed "distorts the political features of our country." He hastily added that it was not his business to "meddle."[45] Romeyn was less hesitant. This "defect" in the Constitution he listed as primary in the list of national sins. "Though it be thus the choice of a Christian people, in it are not recognized even the existence and government of God, much less the authority of his revealed Word." While Romeyn did not want to be understood as recognizing the right of government to interfere in matters of religion or as favoring "exclusive establishment of any particular denomination," he felt that "propriety, reason, and the Word of God" required "the recognition of the existence and providence of God" and "the acknowledgment of his revealed truth." Since the Constitution was "atheistic and unchristian" the whole American populace was "chargeable with irreligion."[46]

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[44] Smith, Sermons, I, 329.

[45] Alexander, Life of Alexander, p. 203.

Although this dissatisfaction was widely voiced, apparently the Presbyterians would have been contented if the officials of government would have continually acknowledged God in more informal ways. George Washington responded to the resolution of Congress, presented by the staunch Presbyterian laymen, Elias Boudinot, with a proclamation of a day of thanksgiving.[47] This became a regular feature of Washington's administration. Washington himself wrote the proclamations and attempted to make them acceptable to all faiths. For this the Presbyterian General Assembly praised him for "on the most public and solemn occasions, devoutly acknowledge(ing) the government of Divine Providence."[48]

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[46] Romeyn, Sermons, II, 337-340.

[47] George Adams Boyd, Elias Boudinot, Patriot and Statesman, 1740-1821 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 173.

[48] MGA, I, 12.

Washington's failure to make an explicit commitment to Christianity, however, created some disappointment in Presbyterian circles.[49]

The administration of John Adams was more satisfactory from the Presbyterian point of view. A fast day in May, 1798 was first proposed by the Synod of Philadelphia and then sanctioned by the federal government.[50] Unlike Washington, Adams had the chaplains of Congress, Bishop William White and Ashbel Green, draft the proclamations. The proclamation calling for a day of prayer in 1799 was written by Green. Concerning this Green recalled,

> To remove the complaint which I knew the religious community of our country had made, namely, that the proclamation calling them to the duty of thanksgiving or fasting lacked a decidedly Christian spirit, I resolved to write one of an evangelical character which should not be liable to this objection, and to take the risk of its being rejected or altered by the President. This I accordingly did, and my draught was published with only the alteration of two or three words not at all affecting the religious character of my production.[51]

With this kind of cooperation the Presbyterians were pleased, but the situation changed when Thomas Jefferson became president. Jefferson refused to recommend days of fasting or thanksgiving because he believed such measures to be an indirect assumption of power that the Constitution had directly forbidden. Jefferson's statement of this position came in response to a Presbyterian request in 1808.[52] During the trying years between the Embargo and the War of 1812 the Presbyterians had themselves proclaimed days of fasting and joined with others in doing so on a local level, but they were convinced that nothing short of a national humiliation could secure the favor of providence.[53]

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[49] Paul F. Boller, Jr., "George Washington and the Presbyterians," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXXIX (September, 1961), 144-145.

[50] Samuel Blair, A Discourse . . . (Philadelphia, 1798), p. 7.

[51] The Life of Ashbel Green, ed. by Joseph H. Jones (New York, 1849), pp. 270-271.

When the nation became involved in the War of 1812, the Presbyterians were convinced that the nation's sin was responsible, and one manifestation of that sin was the neglect of national recognition of God. Samuel Fisher did not hesitate to list as one of the most important causes of the war the fact that the national government for a period of ten years "did not, in a single instance, by any public act, make their acknowledgments to God, either by an expression of gratitude or humility."[54] After James Madison gave in to pressure and issued a proclamation against his own better judgment, the Presbyterians were partly placated although dissatisfied by the general terms of the proclamation. Stephen Rowan of New York interpreted this as the recognition on the part of the administration that the church as the "only legitimate interpreter" of providence had been just in seeing the conflict as God's "rod of . . . indignation."[55]

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[52] Leo Pfeffer, Church, State, and Freedom (rev. ed.; Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 226.

[53] See MGA, I, 409, 410; James Gray, Present Duty (Philadelphia, 1809), pp. 1-4; James Muir, The Efficacy and Goodness of Providence (Alexandria, 1809), pp. 1-6.

[54] Fisher, Two Sermons . . . (1814), p. 44.

The degree to which the Presbyterians desired even this kind of informal recognition of Christianity by the American government made another requirement of the "association between Religion and Patriotism" even more pressing. With disestablishment having destroyed formal connections with Christianity, it seemed that the prior demand of national recognition could only be satisfied by the election of Christian officials. Even Samuel Taggart, a New England Presbyterian who never disavowed the necessity of an establishment of Protestant Christianity, thought the lack of national recognition in the Constitution deplorable and unpardonable but believed this could probably be overcome if the people would elect Christian magistrates.[56]

Prior to 1800 the Presbyterians focused directly on the duties of rulers and tended to ignore the fact of election. This was based on the assumption that the officials would be Christian compounded with the aristocratic point of view which envisioned the "ruling classes" as operating somewhat removed from the influence of the masses. As the molders of the morals and manners of the populace, the attitude of the elite formed the basis of the "national character," upon which depended the favor or condemnation of providence. On another level, it was believed that the workings of providence could depend entirely on the attitude of the government. Romeyn, for example, rhetorically declared that "When the government of a nation is irreligious and immoral, God withdraws his protection, and they soon finish their career of folly."[57] As early as 1784 the Presbytery of New Castle complained of the presence of "debauchees and infidels" in places of public trust and wondered if "there is not a sufficient number of judicious sober professors, in good standing in their respective societies, or the respective denominations of Christians to which they belong, into whose hands we may put the reins of Government?" The concern at that time was that non-Christians in office would "by their pernicious example and opinions . . . corrupt the morals of the people, especially the young and rising generation,"[58] thereby altering the national character.

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[55] Rowan, Sin of Insensibility, p. 7.

[56] Taggart, God's Visitation, p. 35.

When Ashbel Green pointed out in 1798 what was required of a nation to fulfill the laws of God, he emphasized primarily the duties of magistrates. They were to recommend Christianity by practice and example and enact laws for the "suppression of vice and immorality." They were to encourage

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[57] John B. Romeyn, Two Sermons . . . (Albany, 1808), p. 60.

[58] Presbytery of New Castle, An Address to the Congregations under their Care (Wilmington, 1785), p. 13.

"true piety" and recognize the providence of God in their public acts. Particularly, as those "whose station gives influence and fashion to their conduct," the magistrates were to regard the moral laws of God and thus render "in a sort the representation and expression of national sentiment on the subject of morals." As for the people, it was only necessary that the "great principles of piety and morality" should be "generally and effectually taught and inculcated on the public at large," which Green considered, again, to be the duty of the magistrates. If the officials did all of this it would "secure to a christian nation the benefits of the divine promise."[59]

After the election of Jefferson in 1800, the Presbyterians realized that this conception was inept. While the influence of rulers on the people was still held to be significant, in America it was the voter rather than the official who actually provided the better indication of the national character. As Eliphalet Nott put it in a Fourth of July address in 1801,

> The government of our country is a government of opinion, rather than force. More is therefore to be feared from the depravity of ourselves than of our rulers. If *they* become corrupt, *the people* can displace *them*; but if the people themselves become corrupt, it is an evil without a remedy.[60]

The election of non-Christian candidates was thus viewed by Presbyterians as a national sin which could incur the wrath of providence and destroy America's liberties. The Presbytery of New Brunswick addressed a pastoral letter to the congregations under its care in 1801. The letter informed the churches that, "Hitherto, in general, we have as a nation, together with our wise and pious rulers, revered God and his gospel." With recent political events in both France and the United States obviously in mind, the letter continued, "But, should the contrary take place, and we be carried away with the corruptions in principle and practice, so triumphant in the world, and join with the enemies of God, we must then also receive of their plagues." Without being more specific, the letter concluded, "You are then assuredly to expect, that a general rejection of Christ and his gospel, corruption of morals, and reign of vices, will be followed, with as general, temporal and eternal ruin! Should the gospel leave us, earthly blessings will take soon after."[61]

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[59] Green, *Obedience to the Laws of God*, pp. 17-18.

[60] Nott, *Miscellaneous Works*, p. 30.

The election of "infidels" also endangered America's peculiar liberties as the Presbyterians understood them. A few months earlier the Presbytery of New Brunswick had complained of the spread of deistic principles, "the manifest tendency of which is to relax or destroy the restraints of religion, and to set mankind loose, to walk after the way of their heart and the right of their eyes." Deists were declared to be enemies of good government who could "brook no restraints either from divine or human authority." The deists "preach up liberty while they themselves are servants of corruption." The election of such would open the "flood gates to licentiousness."[62]

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[61] Presbytery of New Brunswick, A Pastoral Letter to the Churches under their Care (New Brunswick, 1801), pp. 9-15.

The focus of Presbyterian thinking thus turned from the magistrate to the election of the magistrate. Daniel Dana reminded his congregation that the Biblical injunction, "He that ruleth over men, must be just, ruling in the fear of God," was not only binding on the magistrate but "is likewise designed as a guide to those who elect or appoint civil magistrates." In this sense, the "inestimable privilege" of voting could become the "bitterest of public evils" if abused. Since elections were "important tests of national character" they were "fertile sources of public prosperity or ruin." If the ballot were used to further Christianity, the nation would "still be blest," but if it were used for other purposes the land would suffer "the awful indignation of a righteous God." In America it was not possible to make a sharp distinction between the governed and the governors. The people must share responsibility for the actions of the magistrates.[63]

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[62] Presbytery of New Brunswick, Rules Established by Presbytery (New Brunswick, 1800), p. 23.

[63] Daniel Dana, The Importance of Virtue and Piety as Qualifications of Rulers (Newburyport, 1805), pp. 3-25.

This change in outlook can also be seen in the Presbyterian treatment of what they believed to be the Christian duty of submission to lawful authority. Under the traditional two authority structure, the inculcation of such submission was one of the prime functions of the church. This remained an element of Presbyterian thinking, and in the early days of the republic the Presbyterians were as adept in teaching submission to the new national government as they had been in undermining English rule. The American system, however, not only blurred the two authority distinction but changed the locus of authority in the state from the magistrate to the people. When this began to become clear, the Presbyterian emphasis at this point was largely absorbed into the single issue of electing Christian magistrates.

This can be seen in the different response to the Whiskey Rebellion and the events from the Embargo of 1807 to the War of 1812. In 1794 the inhabitants of western Pennsylvania took up arms to resist what they considered to be an unfair excise tax on whiskey imposed by the Federalist government. The participants in this revolt were largely Presbyterian laymen, but a recent historian of Presbyterian involvement has concluded that "the Presbyterian clergy was unanimous in opposing the insurrection."[64]

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[64] Ronald W. Long, "The Presbyterians and the Whiskey Rebellion," Journal of Presbyterian History, XLIII (March, 1965), 32.

It is not surprising that the Federalist oriented clergy of the coastal region opposed the rebellion, but it is highly significant that the local pastors whose sympathy might be presumed to rest with their congregations so completely concurred in the national Presbyterian judgment.[65]

However unjust they thought the law might be, the Presbyterian ministers firmly believed that rebellion against the "lawful authority" was worse. The magistrate and not the mob was the organ of justice. How unlike the Presbyterian clergy of only two decades earlier! The Presbytery of Redstone, most intimately connected with the affair, viewed the incident as a providential judgment and refused communion to all who had participated in the rebellion until they had given satisfactory evidence of repentance. In preaching from the text, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. . . . They that resist shall receive to themselves damnation," Samuel Porter was giving credence to the Presbyterian contention that religion insured obedience to the law by adding the sanction of divine authority. Whether the religious teaching or the presence of federal troops contributed more to the suppression of the rebellion is an open question, but the Presbyterian ministers knew their role as interpreters of God's providential government and played it well in this national crisis.[66]

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[65] Alexander, Life of Alexander, p. 203; McKnight, The Divine Goodness, pp. 14-15; Dwight Raymond Guthrie, John McMillan: The Apostle of Presbyterianism in the West, 1752-1833 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1952), pp. 107, 158-166.

By the time of the Embargo of 1807 the Presbyterians had made an adjustment to the American situation. By focusing on the power and responsibility of the people to elect Christian magistrates, the Presbyterians were not faced with the alternative of commanding submission to an unpopular administration, as they had in 1794, or preaching sedition and rebellion which was the characteristic response of the conservative New England clergy to these events.[67] The Presbyterians interpreted the ills of the nation as the judgment of providence for national sin. The free, responsible American electorate had embarked on a course unpleasing to providence, the only solution for which was a national reformation.

The Embargo was unpopular among leading Presbyterian divines, and in 1808 the General Assembly felt that its retraction called for a day of thanksgiving and prayer because it had "pleased Almighty God in his wise providence to avert in a great measure the temporal judgments which threatened us."[68] Although it was unpopular the Presbyterians did not lay the blame solely on the administration of Jefferson.

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[66] Long, "Presbyterians and the Whiskey Rebellion," pp. 32-36.

[67] See J. Earl Thompson, Jr., "A Perilous Experiment: New England Clergymen and American Destiny, 1796-1826" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1966), pp. 117-158.

[68] MGA, I, 425.

It was rather, like the administration itself, viewed as a product of national sin. James Muir, speaking before the Washington Society of Alexandria, set the tone of the Presbyterian response, which would be characteristic throughout the trying years ahead. While he counseled his highly partisan audience to submit to the government and not grow impatient under the judgments of providence, Muir emphasized that all was a result of national sin and that a national reformation was the thing needed.[69] As John E. Latta of Delaware put it, "We shall admit, for sake of argument, that the conduct of our rulers is the proximate cause; but still it is evident that our guilt is the remote cause."[70]

In the same fashion, the Presbyterians viewed the War of 1812 as a divine judgment for national sin, part of which was electing non-Christian officials. In 1812 the General Assembly declared that "the indications of danger, no less than of guilt, are too visible to be mistaken." The "portentous and variegated visitations of Heaven's justice" called for a national humiliation in order "to preserve unimpaired, and perpetuate our happy constitution and republican form of government."[71] The next year the

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[69] Muir, Efficacy and Goodness of Providence, pp. 6-7.

[70] John E. Latta, A Sermon . . . (Wilmington, 1808), p. 16.

[71] MGA, I, 497.

Assembly affirmed that "we are all chargeable, both in our civil and ecclesiastical capacities, with many sins, of which it is our duty to repent before God," and called for a national day of fasting.[72]

On this fast day the Presbyterian ministers preached neither rebellion nor submission but national sin. In this approach the twin aspects of political behavior necessary to the "association between Religion and Patriotism" had merged into the single demand applicable to the American situation. From New England to the South, the Presbyterian ministers proclaimed the war to be a result of America's sin. Rowan emphasized providence. If America continued in sin it would only be "laying up in store, some more awful judgments, and preparing the way for the execution of divine vengeance."[73] Nathan Perkins brought providence and liberty together and indicated the connection of America's sin with the election of national officers. "In the United States, the experiment is now making, whether there be knowledge and virtue enough among mankind to be capable of enjoying a free government." In the face of rampant vice the prospect did not appear good in Perkins's estimation. The growth of "infidel and immoral principles" was to be greatly feared "in a free elective government . . . as it has an inauspicious influence on the choice of men, who shall be elevated to places of honour and trust." Perkins believed it to be an undeniable dictum that good people will chose good rulers; bad people, bad leaders, and immoral leaders he believed to be the greatest curse for a republic.[74]

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[72] MGA, I, 513.

[73] Rowan, Sin of Insensibility, p. 47.

The insistence that the elected officials be Christian created some conflict with the national Constitutional settlement which had clearly prohibited a religious test for government officials. The Presbyterians had by this time become accustomed to making the distinction between the formal or voluntary character of certain national policies. By making this kind of distinction, inherent in the "association between Religion and Patriotism," the Presbyterians could declare absolute and unqualified support for the prohibition of a religious test and at the same time insist that if the nation were to prosper its leaders would have to be Christian.

Samuel Fisher made this very explicit in two sermons preached on a fast day in 1814. He defended the thesis that, "a wicked man, at the head of a nation has it in his power to destroy much good." But a wicked man could only rule in America if elected by the people.

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[74] Nathan Perkins, The National Sins, and National Punishment in the Recently Declared War (Hartford, 1812), pp. 5, 18-19.

> And where shall we look for national sin? In a government like ours, it lies at the door of individuals! With individuals, therefore, reformation must begin.
>
> . . . .
>
> I wish it to be distinctly understood, that I am not in favor of any act of Government prescribing a religious test; or making it necessary that a man should be a professor of religion in order to be eligible to a civil office. To such an act I should be totally opposed, in every point of view. But my idea is simply this--that the people themselves, in view of their accountability to God, when about to select their rulers, should seek for men, whether they have ever made a profession of religion, or not, who manifest by their upright conduct, that they are men who fear God.[75]

This subtle distinction which demanded, on an informal basis, what could have been law under an establishment, did not always satisfy members of the congregation. Fisher, for example, thought it necessary to publish his sermon because he had been accused of being an enemy to his country on the basis of these remarks.

Nor were the ministers always consistent. Romeyn, for example, listed as a national sin the "election of men, avowedly immoral and irreligious, to office." In the printed edition of this sermon, Romeyn appended a note exempting Connecticut from the charge because "morality and religion, in the opinion of her sons, are essential qualifications for office." While Connecticut had a religious test for office, Romeyn had declared in the body of the sermon, "Think not that I desire the establishment of any particular denomination of christians, by law, or the introduction of a religious test. No; by no means."[76] The question of the sincerity of the denials of desire for law to enforce election of Christian rulers is decidedly secondary to an understanding of the Presbyterian purpose, which was to achieve the relationship between religion and civil government that formerly would have existed in a society with an established religion. In the American context this cooperation would have to be informal rather than legal.

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[75] Fisher, Two Sermons, pp. 15, 21-22, 58.

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In addition to recognition of providence and government by Christian officials, the Presbyterian "association between Religion and Patriotism" required of civil government that its laws be in accord with the laws of God. In his Lectures Witherspoon listed as the first object of civil law, "To ratify the moral laws by the sanction of the society." While Witherspoon recognized that governments had to enact some laws for the common good that made certain actions "illegal which before were not immoral," civil government was also chargeable with enforcement of those aspects of moral law, "even such as may fall under the discipline of a religious society." While the distinction was clear, the two orders of law were equally necessary to the preservation of the state.[77]

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[76] Romeyn, Two Sermons, pp. 63-64, 80.

[77] Witherspoon, Lectures, pp. 115-117.

American laws, which were formulated largely under the influence of Protestant establishments, were satisfactory to Presbyterians during the early years of nationhood and there was thus little need for them to comment. The primary emphasis fell on the enforcement of existing laws, and within this context Sabbath laws became the central issue for Presbyterians. The sanctity of the Sabbath had been a Presbyterian doctrine of long standing and the concern did not fade in the new nation.[78] The proper observation of the Sabbath was considered by Presbyterians to be the most essential element in the maintenance of morals, and therefore the preservation of the nation, and thus serves as an example of the Presbyterian attitude toward the relationship between Christianity and public law.

The centrality of the Sabbath to the total goal of Presbyterians for the nation was well expressed by the General Assembly of 1814, in one of many petitions to Congress on the subject.

> That the Sabbath contributes to increase the amount of productive labour, to promote science, civilization, peace, social order, and correct morality; inasmuch as it convenes the population of a nation one day in seven to hear the best moral precepts, enforced by the most powerful motives; and as it restrains mankind from those vices which destroy property, health, reputation, intellect, domestic peace, and national

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[78] R. Douglas Brackenridge, "The Development of Sabbatarianism in Scotland, 1560-1650," Journal of Presbyterian History, XLII (September, 1964), pp. 149-165.

> integrity and industry; thus preventing that ignorance and profligacy which tend to reduce the body of the people to poverty and slavery, by throwing the property and power of the nation into the hands of a few.[79]

In 1827 when Gardiner Spring, pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York, was attempting to bring about Sabbath "reform," he could recall wistfully his early years in New York when the streets were chained off to prevent traffic during the time of worship.[80] During this first decade of the nineteenth century, the Presbyterians contented themselves with preaching obedience to the existing laws and encouraging magistrates to enforce them. The Synod of New York and New Jersey, for example, declared in 1809 that the "profanation of the Sabbath" was "in violation of both divine and human laws." That same session also condemned horse-racing and duelling on the same grounds.[81] Every state in the nation at that time had rather rigid Sabbath laws which had been originally adopted under the influence of religious establishments but which were reaffirmed in the constitutional era.[82]

This era of cooperation or happy coincidence ended in 1810 when the Congress of the United States enacted a law which required that post offices remain open "every day on which a mail or bag, or other packet or parcel of letters shall arrive."[83] This law, which would force post offices to remain open on some Sundays, was violently opposed by the Presbyterians. Meeting several months after its adoption, the Synod of Pittsburgh petitioned against it. The Synod informed Congress that the new regulations were "very glaring violations of the laws of God, and therefore an infringment on the rules of conscience. . . ." The petition not only confirmed the Presbyterian position that the laws of the nation ought to be in accord with the "laws of God" and that anything short of that was a restriction on liberty of conscience, but also insisted that such action "may provoke God to inflict upon us, grievious judgments and calamities."[84]

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[79] MGA, I, 566.

[80] Shepherd Knapp, A History of the Brick Presbyterian Church in the City of New York (New York, 1809), pp. 241-242.

[81] Synod of New York and New Jersey, Extracts from the Minutes (Elizabethtown, New Jersey, 1809), pp. 6, 13-14.

[82] Pfeffer, Church, State, and Freedom, pp. 270-273.

The following year the Postmaster General issued more definite orders regulating Sunday post office hours. The offices were to be kept open for one hour following the arrival and sorting of mail on Sunday, unless that time coincided with regularly scheduled hours of worship, in which case the offices would be opened for one hour "after the usual time of dissolving the meetings."[85] This concession did little more than to stir the Presbyterians to greater activity. Beginning in that year, the subject of Sabbath observance became a major item of deliberation in the General Assembly. In the state of religion message of 1811 the Assembly noted:

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[83] Quoted in Anson Phelps Stokes, Church and State in the United States (3 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), II, 13.

[84] Synod of Pittsburgh, Records (Pittsburgh, 1852), p. 74.

> Another unfavourable circumstance of which we have heard, is the prevalence of Sabbath-breaking. For this, indeed, our whole land doth mourn; for this we desire to be humbled before God. The profanation of the Sabbath is as incompatible with morality as with religion. It leads directly to consequences of the most fatal and ruinous kind.[86]

The message went on to point out that only a few "professing believers" were "directly chargeable" with this crime but "indirectly, by quietly suffering others to commit it, without endeavouring to prevent it, or to bring the offenders to punishment." The matter of Sabbath observance was not here considered a matter of individual choice, but a requirement for the whole nation.[87]

This setback for the Presbyterian desires on a national level produced greater activity on a local and state level. In 1811 the Synod of New York and New Jersey appointed committees of five members each for the states represented in the Synod. The committees were "to examine the laws of those States touching the observance of the Sabbath, and to enquire whether any, and if any, what alterations may be made, favourable to the interests of religion." Further, the committee was instructed to "apply to the Legislatures to make any alterations which may be thought advisable.[88]

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[85] Quoted in Stokes, Church and State, II, 13.

[86] MGA, I, 485.

[87] *Ibid.*, 485.

A fast day in 1812 gave the Presbyterian ministers opportunity to plead their cause before their congregations. Joseph Clark labelled Sabbath breaking an "awful sin" and declared that "experience universally proves the fact, that in proportion as the religious observation of the Lord's Day declined, in any place, in the same proportion morals and religion decline." Clark's message was not a call for voluntary submission to Sabbath regulations but an insistence that "magistrates" and "private citizens" exert themselves "to enforce the laws."[89] Arthur Stansbury specifically pointed to the post office regulations in the list of national sins[90] but Romeyn preferred to list it as a national punishment for having made political rather than moral qualifications the "test of office."[91] John Latta felt that because this was "authorized, tolerated, and connived at by the civil authority, and practised by the magistrate and citizen," that it was alone sufficient to bring on the providential judgment of war.[92] It was clear from the Presbyterian point of view that America's official and legal position on religious liberty did not free the American nation from the moral responsibility of obeying the commands of the God of providence.

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[88] Synod of New York and New Jersey, Extracts from the Minutes (Elizabethtown, New Jersey, 1811), p. 40.

[89] Clark, A Sermon . . . (1812), pp. 12-13.

[90] Arthur Joseph Stansbury, God Pleading With America (Goshen, New York, 1813), pp. 14-15.

[91] Romeyn, Sermons, II, 345-347.

The Presbyterian insistence that the national law be in accord with divine law, and the alleged relationship of this to the welfare of the nation, was well expressed in 1812 when the General Asse[illegible]d Congress to repeal the regulation requirin[illegible] remain open on Sunday. In the first paragr[illegible] the Assembly pointed to the prior demand [illegible] the natural law. "The institution of the Sa[illegible]reator and Ruler of the world . . . imposes upon them (men) the reasonable obligation of devoting this day to his service." The petition declared that the post office practice violated this law, even to the extent of depriving the "brute creatures . . . of the rest to which they are entitled by the authority of God."[93]

This radical divergence of the civil law from the teaching of the church was difficult for the Presbyterians to comprehend. The occasion of the petition had been an appeal from the postmaster of Washington, Pennsylvania, who had been suspended from communion for opening the office on Sunday. While the Assembly refused to reverse the decision, a committee was immediately appointed "to consider the propriety of petitioning Congress relative to the repeal of so much of the post-office law as requires the opening of the post-offices and the delivery of letters on the Lord's day."[94] That the connection between these two events was no mere coincidence is confirmed in the petition. It declared, "Your petitioners, moreover, feel themselves constrained in their office as rulers in the Church, to exercise the discipline of that Church against those of their members who break the Sabbath in the carrying or opening of the mail on that day." If the commissioners were aware that their demand for legal enforcement of the Sabbath in any way could be construed as an infringement on liberty of conscience, they did not so indicate. While they were careful to answer the hypothetical objection based on an interpretation of Scripture, that the post office practice as a "work of necessity" was allowable on the Sabbath, they did not mention the more pressing legal and constitutional problems involved in the whole issue.[95] Such legal considerations seemed trivial when it was believed that the future of the nation hung in the balance. The felt that because this was "authorized, tolerated, and connived at by the civil authority, and practised by the magistrate and citizen," that it was alone sufficient to bring on the providential judgment of war.[92] It was clear from the Presbyterian point of view that America's official and legal position on religious liberty did not free the American nation from the moral responsibility of obeying the commands of the God of providence.

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[92] John E. Latta, A Sermon . . . (Wilmington, 1812), p. 21; cf. Perkins, National Sins, p. 11; Rowan, Sin of Insensibility, p. 18.

[93] MGA, I, 514.

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[94] Ibid., 508.

[95] Ibid., 514.

The Presbyterian insistence that the national law be in accord with divine law, and the alleged relationship of this to the welfare of the nation, was well expressed in 1812 when the General Assembly petitioned Congress to repeal the regulation requiring post offices to remain open on Sunday. In the first paragraph of the petition the Assembly pointed to the prior demand and authority of the natural law. "The institution of the Sabbath by the Creator and Ruler of the world . . . imposes upon them (men) the reasonable obligation of devoting this day to his service." The petition declared that the post office practice violated this law, even to the extent of depriving the "brute creatures . . . of the rest to which they are entitled by the authority of God."[93]

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[92] John E. Latta, A Sermon . . . (Wilmington, 1812), p. 21; cf. Perkins, National Sins, p. 11; Rowan, Sin of Insensibility, p. 18.

[93] MGA, I, 514.

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[94] Ibid., 508.

[95] Ibid., 514.

> Your petitioners are the more deeply impressed with the importance of a strict observance of the Sabbath, and the necessity of an alteration in the existing regulations of the post-office, as far as they relate to the Sabbath, from the prospect of a war. As they firmly believe in the special providence of God, and that this providence is exercised according to those principles of truth and equity revealed in the Scriptures, they fear, and have just reason to fear, that the infractions of the Sabbath allowed by civil law, will draw down upon our nation the divine displeasure. God honours those who honour him, and casts down those who forget him. Obedience to his will adds dignity to rulers, and enforces subjection in those who are ruled.[96]

The failure of this petition of 1812 signaled a change in Presbyterian tactics. The 1812 petition had been sent in the name of the General Assembly. In 1814 the Assembly drew up another petition which began, "The subscribers, inhabitants of the town of .... in the state ....," printed 2,000 copies, appointed one minister in each presbytery as an agent to obtain subscribers, and appointed a committee to solicit the aid of other denominations.[97] The General Assembly had learned that the official voice of their denomination carried little weight in the nation's counsels, and it now sought to capitalize on that force which was the peculiar instrument of the "association between Religion and Patriotism," public opinion.

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[96] Ibid., 513-514.

[97] Ibid., 519-520, 565-567. The Synod of Pittsburgh had made the same kind of move earlier. In 1810 it sent a petition in its own name, which did not secure results. In 1811 the Synod printed 200 copies of a petition and sought signatures. Synod of Pittsburgh, Records, pp. 74, 77, 81.

That same Assembly addressed a letter to all Presbyterians which was designed to create support for the petition. This letter clearly voiced the Presbyterian conviction that the nation should adhere to Christian standards. According to the Assembly, "The Lord has instituted the Sabbath as a sign between him and his people--a visible test of their sincerity." If these people violated the duties of that day "or fold their hands in supineness and indifference when they are violated by others, he will regard their offerings as hypocritical and vain." The notion that the Sabbath was the foundation of religion and society was reiterated. "Without the Sabbath there will be no religion--without religion there will be no morality--and that where morality, sound and correct morality, ceases to form the basis of the public manners, the strongest bonds of society are dissolved." While the Assembly cautioned church members to avoid violation of this day themselves, they were also advised to guard the Sabbath against "encroachments made upon it by those who are unhappily ignorant of its blessings, and regardless of its authority and design."[98]

The Presbyterians, as individuals and through denominational structures, continued to press for enforced

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[98] MGA, I, 569-570.

Sabbath observation throughout the period.[99] After 1825, when the post office regulations were coordinated and a law was passed by Congress enforcing the delivery of mail on Sunday, opposition by Presbyterians and others reached an even greater intensity than in previous years.[100]

The Presbyterian insistence that the laws of the nation conform to the natural law as interpreted by Christians, which was most characteristically presented in the debate over Sabbath mail, was in harmony with their interpretation of religious liberty and freedom of conscience. Religious liberty, as the right to worship God according to the dictates of Scripture and conscience, did not also free one from the laws of God. While the theological debates within Presbyterianism sometimes seemed acute, there was no instance of disagreement on that part of the Confession which read, "The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified as others, to the obedience thereof; and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the creator who gave it."[101] This, for Presbyterians, was that "unalienable right" with which man had been "endowed" by the Creator.

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[99] _Ibid._, 577-578, 597-598, 601-602, 634; II, 182-183, 240-242.

[100] Stokes, _Church and State_, II, 14.

[101] _Constitution_, pp. 92-93.

Thus from whatever point of view the Presbyterians viewed America, they concluded that the highest connection between Christianity and the nation was necessary to national prosperity. Their ideas of liberty and freedom on conscience reinforced rather than weakened this position. Liberty combined with the doctrine of providence to form the American Corollary which urged an "association between Religion and Patriotism." This "association" would produce through public opinion what the church had formerly enjoyed through constitutional law.

CHAPTER III

MILLENNIUM

The doctrine of providence and its peculiarly American expression through the American Corollary provided a structural framework through which Presbyterians could voice their interpretation and seek to give direction to the new American nation. While this framework provided an outlet for various social, economic and political directives, it was ultimately subsumed by the religious vision of the Kingdom of God on earth--the millennium. The millennium represented a vision of society on earth freed from the bondage of sin and completely subservient to the will of God. Although this society was assured by the promise of God, its realization required the cooperation and labor of man. While the millennial goal was ultimately universal, an emphasis on a special American role in producing the millennium tended to make the vision of the millennium more nationalistic than the doctrine of providence. The ideals of the millennial state became a pattern of an attempted reconstruction, or "renovation," of American society. The millennium complemented and reinforced the ideas contained in the American Corollary but added dimensions of its own which pointed to methods of operation and formed a dynamic incentive to action.

The centrality of the millennium for an understanding of American Protestantism has only recently been established.[1] H. Richard Niebuhr was the first modern historical critic to see the millennium as a significant interpretative principle.[2] In The Kingdom of God in America, first published in 1937, Niebuhr stated his opinion that "the expectation of the kingdom of God on earth was the great common element" in American Christianity "and that by reference to it one might be able to understand not only the unity beneath the diversity of American religion but also the effect of Christianity on culture."[3] Niebuhr discovered that the kingdom had not meant the same thing in all periods of American life. The seventeenth century he thought could be characterized by the sovereignty of God, the eighteenth by the reign of Christ, and the nineteenth as the period of the coming kingdom or the millennium.[4] According to Niebuhr, the hope of the millennium "was implicit in the period which emphasized sovereignty, became more explicit as the idea of Christ's reign prevailed, and appeared as the leading element in the faith of the nineteenth century."[5] While Niebuhr held that the millennium did not become of central importance until the nineteenth century, he pointed out that the Great Awakening of the 1740's was responsible for making it "the common and vital possession of American Christians."[6]

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[1] David E. Smith, "Millenarian Scholarship in America," The American Quarterly, XVII (Fall, 1965), 535-549. Smith surveyed the existing literature which made use of the millennium as an interpretative principle and pointed to other areas which might be investigated from this point of view.

[2] In 1828 Oliver Wendell Elsbree pointed to the significance of millennialism for the missionary movement of the early nineteenth century. His treatment, however, was confined to the millennium only as it impinged upon missions and he did not see in it an interpretative principle of more far-reaching significance. See The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America; 1790-1815 (Williamsport, Pa.: Williamsport Printing and Binding Co., 1928), pp. 122-145.

[3] Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), p. xi.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

The insights of this professed "amateur"[7] have recently been fully documented by Alan Heimert in _Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution_.[8] According to Professor Heimert, "The watershed in American history marked by the 1740's can be understood best in terms of the degree to which, after the Great Awakening, the American populace was filled with the notion of an impending millennium."[9] While no brief treatment could do justice to the complex work of Heimert, an attempt at stating his major hypotheses will be beneficial as introductory to an exposition of the early nineteenth century Presbyterian millennialism.

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[5] _Ibid_., p. 128.

[6] _Ibid_., p. 143.

[7] _Ibid_., p. x.

[8] (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 38, 61.

[9] _Ibid_., p. 59.

While Heimert interprets the millennium as originally and primarily a religious vision, he believes that it had profound effects on the intellectual life of colonial and revolutionary America which came to fruition socially and politically in the American Revolution and the election of Jefferson in 1800. The primary architect of millennialism was Jonathan Edwards. It is Heimert's contention that Edwards' heirs, an ill-defined group of American religious leaders which Heimert variously describes as "Calvinists," "evangelicals" and "Edwardeans," but which includes Baptists, separatists and others favorable to the revivals, rather than the "Liberal" clergy represented by Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew, "infused the Lockean vocabulary with a moral significance, a severity and an urgency, and thereby translated the ideas of social contract and natural law into a spur to popular activity."[10] Heimert disclaims any intention of tracing the "causes" of the revolution. He defines his task as one of delineating the "sequence of ideas, and their myriad interrelationships," but it is clear that he believes the intellectual currents of 1776 flowed from the millenarian vision of the "Calvinists" rather than the social contract of the "Liberals."[11]

The "Calvinists'" theory of the thousand years of felicity on earth was postmillennial, meaning that the second advent of Christ and the general judgment of the world would follow the millennium. Periodic effusions of the Holy Spirit, or recurring revivals, plus the cooperation of man would combine to produce the millennial state. The cosmic despair of a former age which made necessary a cataclysmic reordering of the forces of nature before the millennium would be possible was replaced by an optimistic view of history which made progress possible and cataclysm unnecessary. According to Heimert, this view of the millennium furnished the "Calvinists" with "a formula in which the good society would and could be attained solely through 'natural causes.'"[12] Heimert clarifies this statement of the means of introducing the millennium by saying that "man's own efforts, God willing and assisting, were the only means of advancing the Kingdom."[13]

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[10] Ibid., p. 17.

[11] Ibid., pp. 12-21, 354, 453.

For Heimert the most significant aspects of millennial thinking in the period from the Great Awakening to the Revolution can be discussed under the categories of liberty, equality and fraternity. The most important of these is fraternity. "The revival and the evangelical impulse," declares Heimert, "pressed to the goal of a more beautiful social order--which meant, in the New World, a union of Americans, freed from the covenant relationships of the parochial past and united by the love which God's American children bore for one another."[14] This desire led to a "millennium . . . in one country" and served as the intellectual basis for American nationalism which was in the Revolution, the adoption of the constitution, and the election of 1800.[15]

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[12] _Ibid._, p. 62.

[13] _Ibid._, p. 79.

The second ideological aspect of millennialism which Heimert emphasizes is liberty, in both civil and ecclesiastical life. Liberty, especially religious freedom, was deemed a necessary antecedent to the millennium. It was this desire for liberty more than anything else that provided colonial America with an effective incentive to unity, or fraternity.[16] According to Heimert's own admission, "All of what Calvinism meant by liberty can probably never be comprehended." The dominant meaning was that of Edwards who insisted that the greatest liberty was conformity to the will of God. Heimert contends, however, that the Calvinist clergy of the Revolutionary era concluded from this that "If men were to be wholly free to do the will of God--to do that which was good, just, and honest--'natural liberty' was an absolute necessity."[17] This freedom to be religious was such a part of the revolutionary mind that political leaders were forced to remind the populace that America's chief danger was a loss of religious privileges.[18] Finally, Heimert believes that the resulting emphasis on "natural liberty" was such that on this point there were "profounder affinities of Jeffersonian and evangelical thought" than has usually been recognized. In this view the cooperation of these two groups would be more out of genuine agreement than because of mere convenience.[19]

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[14] _Ibid_., p. 95.

[15] _Ibid_., pp. 100, 545-550.

[16] _Ibid_., pp. 390-408, 538.

[17] _Ibid_., pp. 454-458.

The third millennial ingredient that Heimert discovers is equality. He contends that this emphasis was such that the traditional Protestant concept of Antichrist as being the Pope of Roman Catholicism was transformed so that the Antichrist came to be those within American society who opposed the Kingdom of God and the equality implicit in it. It was primarily the colonial aristocracy and the "Arminian" clergy who populated this category, although Heimert contends that the division of American society was more psychological than economic or social. The drive for equality was more directed toward an elimination of those who thwarted this equalitarian vision than toward establishing equality within the society.[20] This aspect of millennial thought flourished through the Revolution but, "It was not indeed until the late 1790's that evangelical Americans finally disabused themselves of even a remnant of the thought that the headquarters of the Antichrist were 'across the Atlantic.'" According to Heimert, the "political enthusiasm in support of Jefferson" while based on millenarianism, "rose and throve--not on enmity to the Pope but on 'indignation against the old aristocratic spirit.'"[21]

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[18] *Ibid*., p. 359.

[19] *Ibid*., pp. 537-538. Heimert's attempt to divide colonial America into basically two antagonistic and generally somewhat consistent camps is called into question, however, by the discussions of liberty which run throughout the book. This is especially true with regard to religious liberty. Heimert interprets the Awakening disputes over itinerancy and the right of the people to choose their own pastors as involving the principle of religious freedom in the same way as the later problem of disestablishment and constitutional guarantees of religious liberty. Cf. pp. 36-37, 121, 201, 388-389, 524-525, 547. These would seem to be distinct issues, even if related. Further, by insisting on the existence of only two basic positions, Heimert finds himself in the somewhat implausible position of suggesting that such diverse figures as Timothy Dwight and Isaac Backus at one time substantially agreed on the meaning of religious liberty but subsequently pursued different courses with regard to it. Cf. p. 396. For a treatment of Isaac Backus' position see William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), pp. 136-166). Finally, other historians have pointed to differences in the evangelical and Jeffersonian positions which seem to have been no less real despite Heimert's statements to the contrary. Since his formulation seems directly intended to refute that of Sidney Mead, see *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 16-37.

Heimert insists that the primary intention of _Religion and the American Mind_ is to explore as intellectual history the religious literature of the "Great Awakening and its aftermath." He believes this material to be "worthy of a proper understanding quite apart from any of its possible legacies." It is clear, however, that his interest is oriented toward the political life of the Early National Period and Heimert rarely misses an opportunity to point to the "affinities" of "Calvinism" and Jeffersonian Republicanism.[22] Near the end of his work, Heimert turns to the 1790's where he indicates that the "Calvinist" vision of the millennium contributed significantly to the intellectual outlook of those Americans who elevated Jefferson to the presidency. The millennium was largely secularized and a number of "Calvinist" ministers began to labor for the millennial society through Republican politics. According to Heimert, "Nineteenth-century American Democracy was a lineal descendant of the evangelical party--probably even the truest avatar of the Awakening impulse."[23]

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[20] Heimert, _Religion and the American Mind_, pp. 10, 305-308, 341-345.

[21] _Ibid._, p. 87.

Whether or not future scholarship confirms Heimert's conclusions, he has restored a vital perspective upon eighteenth and nineteenth century American religious life by emphasizing the vision of the millennium. Millennialism had for too long been viewed as an insignificant factor in American religious life or as a doctrine advocated only by those on the radical fringes of religious society. Among nineteenth century Presbyterians, at least, the millennium was of central importance. The themes of liberty and unity which Heimert discussed in the eighteenth century remain, but among Presbyterians they were part of a socially conservative ideology which looked more to the ideal of the cooperation of church and state in the production of a society dominated by Christianity than toward a secular utopia.[24]

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[22] Ibid., pp. vii-xi, 78, 87, 100, 105, 148, 191, 398, 410, 526-527, 534-538, 542-544, 548-549.

[23] Ibid., p. 540.

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[24] On the basis of the material surveyed for the present work, there is some reason to believe that Heimert has been too quick to make connections between millennialism and Jeffersonian Republicanism. Certainly the Presbyterians' millenium did not draw them in that direction. Since Heimert makes very little use of Presbyterian material from the 1790's it would require a different research project to settle this dispute. Because of the importance of Heimert's work, however, some questions should be raised where the research has overlapped.

Heimert relies heavily on David Austin, who was a Presbyterian until 1796, to illustrate the "Republican millennium." There are at least two factors that raise questions about the legitimacy of using Austin as a representative figure. Probably the least important concerns Austin's sanity. Heimert believes that it would be a mistake to dismiss Austin as a mere eccentric, but the real question is not eccentricity but sanity. Apparently Austin was mentally affected by a violent attack of scarlet fever in 1795. The following year his congregation at Elizabethtown, New Jersey asked the Presbytery of New York to sever the pastoral relationship. The presbytery granted this request on the basis that Austin had been suffering under the "powerful influence of enthusiasm and delusion." This decision was based on Austin's own admission that he had had special revelations and other such evidence. The decisive blow to Austin came when the presbytery refused to dismiss him in good standing because of their conviction that his mental condition had terminated his usefulness as a minister. After this time, Austin performed one bizarre act after another which continued to raise the question of his sanity.

The second question is of whom was Austin "representative." After his dismissal from Elizabethtown he returned to New Haven where he was shunned by the Congregationalists. He returned to New Jersey and preached for the Methodists for a time before being dismissed by them. Returning to New England he tried to minister to a Baptist congregation with the same result. The bulk of his preaching from 1800 to 1815, when he acquired a Congregationalist pulpit, was as an uninvited guest who forced himself on audiences gathered for some other purpose.

An additional, and perhaps even more serious question

II

The central conception of the Presbyterian vision of the millennium was that the "world" would be dominated by the "church." By interpreting the millennial "reign of Christ" figuratively, the church as the symbolic Christ would rule the world. Henry Kollock, tutor at the College of New Jersey and later pastor in Savannah, Georgia, precisely articulated the Presbyterian position. In commenting on Revelation 11:15, "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ," and Revelation 12:5, "The woman brought forth a man-child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron," Kollock declared, "It is then of *Christ mystical*, of the succession of true converts, of his

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about the representative quality of Austin comes out of his millennialism itself. According to Heimert, the heart of "Calvinist" millennialism was the fact that the thousand years was to precede the second advent. Austin was a premillennialist! He went so far as to predict the bodily return of Jesus on the fourth Sunday of May, 1796, and this was one of the events that led to his troubles with the congregation. Even after his "Republican conversion," he squandered his personal fortune building houses and a wharf at New Haven from which he hoped to send Jews to Palestine to greet Christ when he came. Further, Austin continued to think of the Antichrist as the pope.

Whatever the merits of Heimert's interpretation of American religion previous to the Revolution, his less documented "hints" about the Early National Period are to be seriously questioned. For Heimert's emphasis on Austin see *Religion and the American Mind*, pp. 7, 81, 105, 379, 536-537, 545. For an account of Austin's life see William B. Sprague, ed., *Annals of the American Pulpit* (9 vols.; New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857-1869), II, 195, 206, which contains two separate documents. For Austin's millenarianism see David Austin, *The Millennium: or, the Thousand Years of Prosperity . . .* (Elizabethtown, 1794); *The Dawn of Day, Introductory to the Rising Sun* (New Haven, 1800).

spiritual church and people, that the scripture here speaks." It was Kollock's opinion that "these . . . shall finally obtain sovereign power over the nations."[25] It was this vision rather than the hope of a radical social and political change that formed the heart of the Presbyterian millennium.

The emphasis on liberty among the Presbyterians of the 1790's can only be properly understood in this light. The Presbyterians were not interested in liberty as an abstract right or quality, as has been demonstrated in Chapter II.[26] It was their firm conviction that "civil and religious establishments" had prevented men from accepting the truth of the Christian religion and becoming evangelical Protestants. Under these systems, Romeyn declared, men "are not free to obey what they know to be good, but forced to obey that which is evil."[27] The Presbyterians believed as firmly that once man possessed full freedom he would soon surrender to what they believed to be the overpowering influence of the Gospel. Liberty was necessary before the world could become uniformly Christian. Freedom in terms of independence from the control of Christianity was thought to be nothing more than some kind of half-way house on the road to universal domination of the world by the church.

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[25] Henry Kollock, _Sermons on Various Subjects_ (4 vols.; Savannah, 1822), IV, 123. Very few Presbyterians followed the more nationalistic interpretation of the later passage which identified the United States as the child born to the woman who fled into the wilderness. Cf. Austin, _The Millennium_, p. 392.

[26] _Supra_, pp. 60-61.

[27] John B. Romeyn, _A Sermon . . ._ (Philadelphia, 1808), p. 15.

The best illustration of the Presbyterian emphasis on liberty as it impinged on the millennial hope is their reaction to the French Revolution. William Linn, whose interpretation of the millennium was widely accepted among Presbyterians, wrote in 1794 that the "most auspicious sign of the time" was the spread of liberty, "first in America, and now in France." The significance of this Linn noted in the rhetorical question, "Is not the prevalence of civil liberty necessary to the reign of Righteousness and peace?" While he recognized the existence of "infidelity" in France, this caused him no particular concern at this date. He was convinced that, "Soon as the design for which a wise God hath permitted it, is answered, religion will return in primitive purity and power."[28]

When primitive Christianity did not soon appear in France the Presbyterians were forced to modify the statement of their position. John McKnight of New York was probably the last to lose hope in the possibilities of the French Revolution. As early as 1795 he had encountered some opposition from his fashionable congregation because of his views on the subject, but in 1802 he was still convinced that France would yield to the "true religion." In that year he reminded his congregation that "God works in ways not altogether conformable to the expectations and views of man." While he personally loathed the contemporary French situation he was confident that God was at work in it.[29] Jonathan Freeman, however, spoke for the majority of Presbyterians when in 1798 he lamented, "We were attached to the revolution--prayed for and rejoiced in its success. We beheld Antichrist falling like lightning from heaven--we hailed the millenial (sic) dawn. But alas! where is that boasted religious liberty?"[30]

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[28] Linn, Signs of the Times, pp. 11-12, 19.

While liberty as a central theme of ejaculations about the millennium was replaced after the turn of the century by more overt declarations of the theocratic vision, the Presbyterian position did not change substantially. Any removal of enforced religious opinion was still viewed as an opportunity for the advancement of Christianity but the Presbyterians had learned that liberty could lead to "licentiousness" as well as primitive Christianity.[31] Samuel Miller, at the time a young pastor in New York and ardent supporter of Jefferson, pointed to the reformulated statement of the position in 1798. Miller continued to argue that all ecclesiastical and civil establishments, those "fabrics of superstition and despotism" and "systems of unnatural domination," would have to be destroyed before the millennium. He did not fail to point out, however, that "all the vain schemes of those who would govern the heart without religion, and regulate society without God" would also have to vanish.[32] Miller's position was as decidedly theocratic as it was violently anti-Erastian. In the millennium the state would not dictate in manners of religion but would give its entire support to the true religion.

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[29] McKnight, Divine Goodness, pp. 4-5, 11-12; A View of the Present State of the Political and Religious World (New York, 1802), pp. 22-23.

[30] Jonathan Freeman, A Sermon . . . (New Windson, 1799), p. 18.

[31] James Blythe, A Portrait of the Times (Lexington, Kentucky, 1814), pp. 21-22.

The major text for the millennial theocracy came from Isaiah 49:23, "And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet."[33] In the millennium God would supremely "govern the world for the sake of the church."[34] Such government, of course, could never be oppressive because all would freely submit to its authority. Liberty would be complete because all would seek to do the will of God voluntarily. A typical statement of the Presbyterian dream is that of Romeyn:

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[32] Miller, A Sermon . . . (1798), pp. 27, 33.

[33] For examples of usage of this passage see Blythe, Portrait of the Times, p. 21; Archibald Alexander, A Missionary Sermon . . . (Philadelphia, 1814), p. 29. Samuel B. How, A Sermon . . . (Savannah, 1825), p. 11; Sabine, Moral Duties, p. 7.

[34] Spring, Memoirs of Samuel J. Mills, p. 246.

> A complete and thorough change will then take place in the governments of nations. The magistrate will then be, what he ought ever to be, according to the design of his office, a minister of God for good. The kings and judges of the earth will then do, what they now ought to do, "kiss the Son," that is, acknowledge the mediatorial authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The State will then be handmaid of the Church. The officers of the one will co-operate with those of the other, for the promotion of God's glory, and the happiness of men. . . . All the enemies of the Church will be slain, and their memory be an abhorrence to all flesh.
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> . . . .
>
> Thus delivered from the hands of those who are her enemies; protected and nursed by the magistracy; united in her members, peace will indeed be extended to her as a river.[35]

There was nothing new or radical in this vision. The hope was nothing more or less than an idealized version of a pattern of church-state cooperation that had already been attempted various times in the past. According to John H. Rice, when Christianity was established by Constantine "it was thought that the time foretold by the prophet had fully come, 'when kings should be nursing fathers and queens nursing mothers to the church.'" But since Christianity had then been made into an instrument of state it was nothing but "deceitful smiles." The full realization of the ideal would come only in the millenium.[36]

Because of their peculiar understanding of the nature and benefits of liberty the Presbyterians had been able to cooperate fully with other Americans of different views in the "Lively Experiment." By the time those differences became apparent in the triumph of other opinions, the Presbyterians found it necessary to work toward the theocratic vision without the immediate benefit of "nursing fathers." A more detailed examination of the Presbyterian attempts to implement the theocratic vision in American society will be presented in Chapter V.

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[35] Romeyn, Sermons, I, 157, 159.

[36] Rice, Importance of the Gospel Ministry, p. 6; cf. Taggart, God's Visitation of Sinful Nations, p. 31.

In the economic and social order as well as in the political order, the Presbyterian ideal of the millennial state was a religious domination of existing structures. In the millennium "religion (would) dwell in the palace as well as in the cottage" but there was no inclination on the part of the Presbyterians to envision millennial egalitarianism.[37] The general social principles required in the millennium did not differ from what was demanded by the Presbyterian interpretation of the doctrine of providence. According to Romeyn, "The Spirit of God will, to an extraordinary degree, enlighten the minds of the members of the Millennial Church; so that they will understand their duty and privilege, in all the relations of life, social as well as religious, and civil or political as well as social." This meant among other things that "persons of rank and influence will not abuse their blessings to gratify pride and vanity; nor the abundance of their tables, to promote gluttony, drunkenness and lust."[38]

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[37] How, A Sermon . . . (1825), p. 17.

The equality of the millennium would be based on a common possession of and adherence to the Scriptures. According to Blythe,

> This (the Bible) is the great leveller. Not by inspiring the peasant with ambition to mount into his master's throne, or wresting from the hand of sovereignty its delegated power. Not by "setting servants upon horses, and causing princes as servants to walk upon the earth." No: but by the faith of that blessed gospel which every where pronounces benedictions upon the poor--which sanctions and inspires the sacred name of brother--which commands us to "render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour." Let every man's cottage, and every prince's palace, be blessed with a Bible, and the work of fraternizing the world is done, the work of war is over, and every man meets in every other man a brother and a friend.[39]

While the Presbyterians did not conceive of an egalitarian millennium, they were during this period unable to reconcile Negro slavery with the millennial vision. It was believed that emancipation was to be achieved before the millennium began, but the Presbyterians generally did not think that they should actively crusade for that cause. It was to them a matter of secondary importance. The more immediate concern was for the religious instruction of the Negro which would give him the "liberty of the Gospel." In the meantime, the Negro was advised that patience and subordination were the best ways to hasten the millennium.[40]

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[38] Romeyn, Sermons, I, 151, 154.

[39] Blythe, Portrait of the Times, pp. 34-35.

The one social change most desirable to the Presbyterians was perfectly consistent with the ideology of religious conquest. In an age when ministerial power and influence seemed to be declining rapidly, they pointed to a millennium in which this would not be the case. Samuel Miller, who probably dwelt on the ministry more than any other Presbyterian of that era, explained that even in the millennium man would be born in sin and in need of the administration of the gospel. Further, all the ordinances of religion would be universally observed. The result would be that "the ministers of religion will be more numerous, more sought after, and more beloved, than in any former period."[41]

While the Presbyterian view of the millennium could largely incorporate the existing political, social and economic structures on the assumption that they would be brought under the control of Christianity, there was one existing structure that was intolerable--a divided church. A church divided among parties each claiming a correct understanding of the true religion for itself was totally inconsistent with the view of world domination. If the church was to reign with Christ it must be at peace with itself. It must be unified, and the Presbyterians believed that unity was promised in the Scriptures as a characteristic of the millennial church.

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[40] See John Chester, A Sermon . . . (Hudson, New York, 1813), pp. 25-26; Miller, A Sermon . . . (1823), p. 24; Edward D. Griffin, A Plea for Africa (New York, 1817), pp. 32-34. For a recent historical account of the Presbyterian relationship to the Negro see Andrew Murray, Presbyterians and the Negro--A History (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966).

[41] Samuel Miller, A Sermon . . . (Boston, 1822), p. 27. Cf. Nott, Miscellaneous Works, p. 158; Romeyn, Sermons, I, 148-150. Some Presbyterians believed that there would be different degrees of honor and happiness even in heaven in proportion to the amount of piety and good works in this life. Faithful ministers would receive the places of greatest glory. Cf. Kollock, Sermons, IV, 48-49; Ezra Stiles Ely, Retrospective Theology, of the Opinions of the World of Spirits (Philadelphia, 1825), p. 8.

Unlike modern ecumenists, the Presbyterians of the Early National Period conceived of church unity solely in the context of Protestantism and that primarily in theological rather than institutional terms. Roman Catholicism was believed to be one with the Antichrist and would be destroyed before the millennium. On the other hand, very little was said about forms of church government, administration of sacraments, or liturgy. Romeyn's treatment of these questions is representative. He felt that divisions in the structures of the church were produced partly through corruption of the true religion and partly by a multiplicity of civil environments. In the millennium "the distinctions of names, of countries, of doctrines, and of government, will be done away." This was all the discussion required on questions of polity and organization. Romeyn's vision of "one visible body" or "one spiritual community" was primarily of another nature which requires explication.[42]

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[42] Romeyn, Sermons, I, 145-147.

The primary emphasis in the idea of unity was that of theological agreement. According to Romeyn, in the millennium "there will be no diversity of opinion."[43] The same assumptions that led Presbyterians to demand liberty also informed deliberations about Christian unity. The Scriptures were believed to be an infallible source of truth which could be comprehended by those earnestly seeking it. Once man had the complete freedom to study the Bible, truth would triumph. Since religious truth was considered to be "one and the same" it was considered to be only a matter of time, and certainly by the dawn of the millennium, before religious uniformity would prevail.[44]

Daniel Dana, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, expressed it as his opinion that the most prominent feature of religion in America was "a multiplicity of systems" which led to an "endless variety of opinions." "It is evident," he declared, "that the great mass of them can be neither more nor less than collections of error--of error adorned by different degrees of ingenuity and learning, but certainly not transmuted into truth." The problem was subject to solution, however, as long as all groups held to a plenary inspiration of Scripture. "As long as this book is admitted to be from God . . . so long we have a test by which to try conflicting opinions and schemes; an authority to which all parties and sects may be expected to pay some regard."[45] In his own sermons Dana took great pains to prove that the doctrines he held and preached were in fact the doctrines of Scripture![46]

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[43] Romeyn, Sermons, I, 148.

[44] See ibid., 148-150; Miller, A Sermon . . . (1822), p. 21; Samuel Miller, The Earth Filled with the Glory of the Lord (Boston, 1835), p. 7; Matthew LaRue Perrine, The Nature and End of the Gospel Dispensation (New York, 1816), pp. 12-13, 20-23; Isaac V. Brown, First Principles, or Hints to Suit the Times, and Calculated to Promote Ecclesiastical Union (Trenton, New Jersey, 1821), pp. 3-4.

Some Presbyterians despaired of an entire uniformity of opinion and made toleration the focus of millennial unity. Even in this context, however, it was assumed that there would be agreement on major doctrines. The faith of the future would be the "faith once delivered for the saints" and no Presbyterian could envision that as being too different from his own. As Ashbel Green put it, "We do not believe that great discoveries are yet to be made, in regard to the doctrines of the word of God."[47] Blythe was one of those who felt it unreasonable to expect the millennial unity to be "letter perfect." Speaking before the Synod of Kentucky in 1814, however, he could not refrain from pointing out that

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[45] Daniel Dana, A Sermon . . . (Andover, 1817), pp. 9-13.

[46] For an example of this see Daniel Dana, A Sermon on the Atonement (Concord, Massachusetts, 1824), pp. 9-13.

[47] Ashbel Green, Lectures on the Shorter Catechism (Philadelphia, 1829), p. 13.

> The Christian churches, and particularly the churches in Western America, have been deeply wounded by a set of theological knight-errants, who have not blushed to baptize the effusions of their personal dislike, or stupid bigotry, with the holy name of a contention for the faith. Thus has the peace of Christ's house been broken up, and christianity disgraced.[48]

Continuing the theme of "forbearance," Blythe believed that the solution to the contemporary problem of diversity was a cooperative effort in the work of Christ with a suppression of debate on theological differences. It is clear from his entire sermon, however, that the extent of his cooperation would be circumscribed by basic theological agreement.[49]

Thus while the ideal of a unified church received constant expression, few Presbyterians gave form or content to the vision. The emphasis was primarily on theological unity and most statements exhibit more than a suspicion that theology during the millennium would closely resemble that of the contemporary American Presbyterianism. To expand on the nature of the millennial unity would have, in fact, destroyed the vision. In an age not prone to the opinion that one religious belief was as good as another, it was easier to agree that all would one day comprehend the truth alike than to specify even the barest outlines of the nature of that truth. It was the very illusoriness of the idea of unity that made it a powerful agent in bringing Presbyterians together with various other elements of American Protestantism in a system of cooperation at a time when unity seemed to be the essence of survival.[50]

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[48] Blythe, Portrait of the Times, p. 40.

[49] Ibid., p. 40. The interdenominational institutions with which the Presbyterians associated were in fact primarily committed to the Reformed tradition.

III

The Presbyterians universally agreed that the millennium was imminent. The prophetic calendar which dated the introduction of the millennium no later than 2000 and possibly as early as the 1860's was so widely accepted that most Presbyterian ministers believed it necessary only to state that "the most judicious commentators have concluded, that the predicted period is at length nearly arrived."[51] The two commentators read most widely by American Presbyterians were William Linn and Alexander M'Leod, neither of them Presbyterians. The millennial calculations were based on an interpretation of the one thousand two hundred days of Revelation 11:3 and "a time and times, and half a time" of Revelation 12:13 as meaning that the reign of Antichrist, or the Roman pope, would last 1260 years. As Linn pointed out, "The great difficulty . . . is when to date the commencement of the thousand two hundred and sixty years."[52] If the date were calculated from 606 when the pope was declared universal bishop, the millennium would commence in 1866. If the chronology were calculated from Gregory II's acquisition of temporal power in 729, the millennium would be delayed to near the end of the twentieth century. While there were other dates preferred by some, most fell between these extremes. Linn was of the opinion that as the power of the Antichrist had grown gradually it would diminish in the same fashion. Therefore, without attempting to set a precise date, Linn simply affirmed, "It may be near the two thousandth year of Christ, before the church enjoys the greatest prosperity; yet there is reason to believe that preparatory events are much nearer, and that even we may see a day of the Son of man."[53]

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[50] For an example of this practical side of unity see Muir, Ten Sermons, p. 7. For the effect of millennial study in the promotion of unity see Kollock, Sermons, IV, 13.

[51] John Blair Smith, The Enlargement of Christ's Kingdom (Schenectady, New York, 1797), p. 31.

Most Presbyterians, like Samuel Miller, refused to discuss in detail the dating of the millennium. While accepting the opinion of the "commentators" Miller reasoned that it was only logical for the history of the world to follow the analogy of creation. Assuming that the world was created during six days in 4000 B.C., Miller then dated the coming of the world's "Sabbath" millennium at around 2000 A.D.[54] The only representative Presbyterian commentary on Revelation to appear during this period was by Henry Kollock.

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[52] Linn, _Signs of the Times_, p. 154.

[53] _Ibid._, p. 160.

[54] Miller, _A Sermon . . ._ (1798), p. 10.

who had earlier been tutor in theology at the College of New Jersey. Kollock dismissed the whole problem of dating the millennium in a few pages. Since he believed the millennium to be imminent, the exact date was of little importance to him. Like most other Presbyterians, Kollock felt it necessary only to declare to his congregation that "in this very house, long, very long before, in the course of nature, it can crumble into ruins, will the millennial glories of the church be displayed."[55] For the Presbyterians the millennial vision was too dominating to be obscured and lost in a maze of chronological speculation.

If the Edwardsean vision can be described as non-cataclysmic postmillennialism, the Presbyterian position in the early decades of the nineteenth century was semi-cataclysmic postmillennialism.[56] The Presbyterians

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[55] Kollock, Sermons, IV, 124, 175-177.

[56] There seems to be some imprecision in Heimert's use of the term "premillenarianism." He mentions that one of the factors in the rise of a "Calvinist Federalism" was "a return to premillenarianism among clergymen perplexed and then frightened by the course of the French Revolution." Presumably Samuel Hopkins is included in this category, as his name occurs in the same sentence and he is often designated by Heimert as a Federalist. Hopkins, however, was a postmillenarian in the same sense as contemporary Presbyterians. Apparently Heimert uses "premillenarianism" to indicate the belief that calamity would accompany the introduction of the millennium rather than the usual employment of the word to designate the return of Christ before the millennium. Heimert also uses chiliasm, always in a cataclysmic context, as a synonym of premillenarianism. See Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, pp. 64-65, 71, 113-114, 117, 489, 496, 535. For Hopkins' understanding of the second advent as following the millennium see Samuel Hopkins, A Treatise on the Millennium (Boston, 1793), pp. 42-55.

The terms "premillenarianism," "premillennialism" and looked for the return of Christ after the thousand years, but unlike Edwards, they expected that the advent of the millennium would be attended by some calamity. The limitation of the calamity to a small portion of Europe, however, enabled the Presbyterians to look for a millennium that would be brought about primarily by the gradual extension of the gospel over the rest of the world.

The extent to which postmillennialism prevailed among early nineteenth century Presbyterians can best be seen in the works of Amzi Armstrong, a premillennialist who labored constantly but unsuccessfully to convince his colleagues of their errors. In 1815 he published A Syllabus of Lectures on the Visions of the Revelation in an attempt to refute the

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"postmillennialism" were not in use during this period. "Millenarian" was used to describe what is now called "premillennialism" and "premillenarianism," and the postmillennial position was without a specific designation since it was the majority position and there was little controversy. After the 1820's when there was a significant increase of militant "millenarianism," a distinction was made between the "pre-millennial" and "post-millennial" return of Christ. This distinction formed the basis of the contemporary terms "premillennialism" and "postmillennialism," which came into common usage during the 1850's. In the transitional period of the 1830's and 1840's postmillennialism was frequently referred to as "Whitbyanism," or the "temporal" or "spiritual millennium," while "millenarianism" continued to be used with reference to premillennialism. "Chiliasm" has always been a proper synonym for "millenarianism" or "premillennialism." Thus while any use of the terms "premillenarianism," "premillennialism" and "postmillennialism" with reference to this period is anachronistic, the usage I have employed is consistent with the historical definitions of those terms. See D. T. Taylor, The Voice of the Church on the Coming and Kingdom of the Redeemer, revised and edited by H. L. Hastings (Peace Dale, Rhode Island, 1855); "A Congregationalist," The Time of the End (Boston, 1856); George Duffield, Millenarianism Defended (New York, 1843); John McDowell, Fifty Years a Pastor (Philadelphia, 1855).

"commonly received opinions."[57] The extent to which Armstrong failed is clearly indicated in a sermon of 1824. An old man returning to his former pulpit, Armstrong made one last attempt to inculcate his favorite doctrine. He reminded his congregation that,

> The Scripture doctrine of the general judgment, and of "the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ," has not commonly been taught in this form, or under this view of it, since men aspired to be Lords over God's heritage, and have gloried in the idea of a visible head of the Church on earth, in the place and stead of Christ; for it suited their purposes much better to allegorize and spiritualize the Scriptures on this subject, in such a way as to leave room for them to arrogate to themselves the honour, and the authority, and the power in the Church, which belong to Christ alone.[58]

Armstrong complained about postmillennialism that "so entirely has this scheme prevailed" that it had "chained down the minds of men in darkness on this subject."[59]

It has already been pointed out above[60] that the Presbyterians interpreted the "reign of Christ" as a symbol of the reign of the church. The opinion that the millennium would precede the second advent of Christ was so firmly established among Presbyterians that it was unnecessary to defend it. As late as 1834 when premillennialism had found new champions in England, Archibald Alexander could still dismiss the whole scheme as "destitute of all solid foundation." For Alexander it was simply unreasonable to consider, since Christ would have to live in some particular location, thus depriving the rest of the world of his personal leadership.[61] In the millennium Christ would reign through his church.

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[57] (Morristown, New Jersey, 1815), pp. 3, 237-238.

[58] Amzi Armstrong, The Last Trumpet (New York, 1824), p. 17.

[59] *Ibid*., p. 17.

[60] *Supra*, p. 118.

The postmillennialism of the Presbyterians denied the possibility of the "happy state of the church" being introduced by miracle. Since the millennium then would come through the exertions of man, there was implicit in the theory an idea of progress which ultimately committed the Presbyterians to an optimistic view of history. This long range optimism, as will appear below, was based on what were believed to be the promises of God and a deep conviction in the power of the gospel rather than on any confidence in the power of man.[62]

A literal-oriented reading of the Scriptures, however, and the course of events from 1775 to 1815, especially the wars in Europe, convinced the Presbyterians that the movement toward the millennium would be both interrupted and consummated by a cataclysmic destruction of the Antichristian forces. A typical description of the results of the cataclysm is that of Romeyn.

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[61] Alexander, The Pastoral Office, p. 23.

[62] Miller, Earth Filled with the Glory of the Lord, pp. 8, 23, 26; James Richards, The Spirit of Paul the Spirit of Missions (Boston, 1814), p. 20.

> It will be a period of calamity, distress, impiety, ferocity, tyranny, superstition, and gross ignorance: a period darker than the middle ages . . . : a period in which the principles of civilization will be destroyed by those of barbarian rudeness. The state of society will be deplorable, both as it respects intercourse between man and man, and nation with nation. The bonds of union will be dissevered; the foundations of order torn up; and a lawless, unprincipled, and superstitious tyranny, in church and state, will prevail. . . .[63]

What saved the Presbyterians from a totally illogical view of the future is indicated by the completion of Romeyn's statement. The condition described ". . . will prevail not in one nation, but throughout the spiritual Sodom and Egypt--the mystical Babylon, among all the ten kingdoms, which have given their power to the beast."[64] The final cataclysm would involve only that portion of the world once dominated by Roman Catholicism. The horror of the cataclysm was somewhat further reduced by the idea that the destruction of the Antichrist would occur by degrees. The battle of Armageddon became symbolic of a series of wars confined to the "Old Latin earth" rather than a single and decisive battle between the forces of light and darkness.[65]

Interpreted in this light, cataclysm became relatively unimportant in the vision of American Presbyterians except for two considerations. In the first place, those same events in

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[63] Romeyn, Sermons, I, 182. For a similar description see Miller, A Sermon . . . (1799), pp. 26-27.

[64] Romeyn, Sermons, I, 182.

[65] Richards, Spirit of Paul, p. 23; Edward D. Griffin, A Sermon . . . (New York, 1819), pp. 7-8.

Europe which from 1790 to 1815 aided the revival of emphasis on cataclysm also increased the millennial expectation. This was especially true of the events in France from the revolution through the Napoleonic wars. France was viewed as the "tenth part" of the Roman kingdom supposedly referred to in Revelation 11:13, and the constant activity there, whether otherwise favored or opposed, served to feed the belief in an imminent millennium.[66] This emphasis was such that, while the majority of Presbyterians thought it only the "beginning of sorrows," some actually thought that the battle of Armageddon, symbolically understood, had begun with the French Revolution. James Blythe declared in 1814 that only "a few random shots may still be exchanged between the adverse parties" before the millennium commenced.[67]

A second result of this interpretation was that America was viewed as being exempt at least from the worst and possibly from all of the calamities that would precede the millennium. This belief was based on the conviction that the wrath of God would be directed only towards those nations that had persecuted the saints and those governments that had through establishments perverted Christianity and made it an instrument of the state. While the statements of this position ranged from a cautious hope, or even prayer, to a firm conviction, the Presbyterians were generally convinced that their efforts to build up the "American Zion" would not be destroyed in the cataclysm.[68]

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[66] See McKnight, View of the World, pp. 20-23; Taggart, God's Visitation of Sinful Nations, pp. 58-64; Miller, A Sermon . . . (1799), p. 27; Daniel Dana, A Discourse . . . (Newburyport, 1814), pp. 19-20.

[67] Blythe, Portrait of the Times, p. 30. For similar opinions see Richards, The Spirit of Paul, p. 23 and Griffin, A Sermon . . . (1819), p. 23.

While America's exemption from the calamities was sometimes predicated on virtuous behavior,[69] the millennial vision generally allowed a much more optimistic view of America's future than did the doctrine of providence. In the providential view, American prosperity was interpreted as the legacy of pious forefathers and a bright future could only come from a continuation of this supposed tradition.[70] But the view of the millennium was unencumbered by the necessities of adhering to the standards of an ideal "Golden Age" in America's past. America was indeed to have a significant hand in bringing the millennium into being. Most Presbyterians would have agreed with James Blythe that "The discovery and civilization of America is one of the grand preliminary events intimately connected with the latter day of glory, and indeed forming quite an essential part of the important plan." While Blythe did not hesitate to point out the potential of American agriculture to feed the "myriads of people shortly to fill the earth," his main concern was of a different nature.

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[68] Fisher, Two Sermons, p. 39; Latta, A Sermon . . . (1808), p. 23; Miller, A Sermon . . . (1798), pp. 29-30. Henry Kollock expressed the conviction that Africa and Asia would probably share America's exemption. See his Sermons, IV, 114, 136-138.

[69] Taggart, God's Visitation of Sinful Nations, pp. 58-46.

[70] Nott, Miscellaneous Works, pp. 29-32.

> Upon human affairs, but particularly upon God's church, it (America) is designed to have the effect of a new creation. . . . In everything relative to our beloved country--her discovery, her political regeneration, her unparalleled form of government, but above all, her religious institutions, I seem to see Jehovah as with his finger designating America to a post the most honourable, in his new kingdom of glory.[71]

That this statement came in the midst of war illustrates how far the millennial vision could look beyond the gloom of the moment. In the words of John M. Mason, "From the eminence of scriptural prediction, a humble believer overlooks the mole-hill of worldly politics, and decries the moving power, and the necessary effect, of the machinery of Providence."[72]

The relative unimportance of cataclysm in light of the millennial vision is well attested in Kollock's commentary on Revelation. Kollock omitted chapters sixteen through nineteen which contain a description of the Antichrist and "a particular account of the mode of his destruction." As these prophecies were to be fulfilled in the very near future, Kollock explained, "It is enough for us to know that these events are certain." While thus eliminating all discussion of the future calamities, Kollock hastened to affirm that,

> Immediately after this, the millennium . . . shall bless the church and the world. It is true this event also is future; nevertheless, we may with confidence speak concerning it; for it is not mentioned merely

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[71] Blythe, Portrait of the Times, pp. 5-9.

[72] The Writings of John M. Mason, ed. by Ebenezer Mason (4 vols.; New York, 1832), I, 150.

> in a single passage of scripture, but is described in both testaments, and is referred to in every portion of the sacred volume. Let us then proceed to a more detailed examination of this subject, which is so associated with the best feelings of the believer.[73]

The vision of the "spiritual church" gaining "sovereign power over the nations" was so bright that the calamities appeared dim by comparison.

The effect, then, of this diluted apocaplyticism was to heighten the millennial expectation and strengthen the ideas of a special American destiny. At the same time, although fraught with certain logical inconsistencies, optimism that man's attempts to extend the gospel and progress toward the millennial state was not seriously impaired.

IV

The Presbyterian optimism that the historical process would lead to a thousand years of bliss on earth was grounded in faith in the promises of God and the power of the gospel rather than on any confidence in man. The Presbyterians of this era held almost to a man the federal doctrines of original sin and total depravity.[74] Having also rejected the idea that the millennium would be ushered in by a miraculous and universal reordering of nature, the Presbyterians held that the "knowledge of the Lord" would spread over the earth, effecting a moral change in man and bringing in the millennium. Since it was believed that God ordinarily worked through human instruments, the spread of the gospel and consequently the coming of the millennium ultimately depended on the efforts of Christians.

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[73] Kollock, Sermons, IV, 166-167.

[74] H. Shelton Smith, Changing Conceptions of Original Sin: A Study in American Theology Since 1750 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. 1-9, 125-136.

During this era the Presbyterians extended the doctrine of man's depravity beyond the area of salvation to preclude the possibility of cultural progress for natural man. In its extreme form this doctrine allowed movement from barbarism to civilization in any degree only under the influence of Christianity or of some nation that had better preserved the original revelation given to Adam, with the latter appearing to be very unlikely. In this view the first human society was the most "civilized" in the history of mankind. Under the influence of Christianity civilization could progress, but where it was not known man and his culture could do nothing but deteriorate. In the millennium civilization would once again regain the heights of the first society.

What the Presbyterians meant by civilization presents a problem. The concept is ambiguous at best and in all probability it was used without a consciously precise definition. In various contexts it included man's intellectual, moral and social character.[75] In the simplest usage it was merely the opposite of savagery or barbarism and demanded a settled agricultural or commercial economy. It certainly indicated a harmonious, well mannered and moral society. While the concept always indicated a certain degree of knowledge about those things essential to man's welfare, it sometimes included the fine arts, methods of written communication and other advanced sciences.[76]

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[75] Miller, A Sermon . . . (1822), pp. 6-7.

Whatever its exact meaning, the whole idea of civilization was secondary. The function of the concept was to emphasize the tendency of man and society to degenerate. The Presbyterians were appalled by the British philosophers (especially Godwin) and Condorcet, who taught the perfectibility of man. While they recognized the similarity of the Christian millennium to the "dream" of the philosophers, they violently disagreed with the idea that man could create a perfect society without the aid of Christianity. Miller thought it utterly inconceivable that philosophy could "purify, tranquilize, and perfect human society," for that was the work of God. "He will bring good out of evil, order out of confusion, light out of darkness, and a kingdom of the greatest glory and blessedness out of materials which are totally depraved."[77]

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[76] For various usages see Samuel E. M'Corkle, *A Charity Sermon* (n.t.p., 1793(?)), p. 53; Joshua Moore, *A Discourse . . .* (Detroit, 1824), p. 6; Romeyn, *A Sermon . . .* (1808), p. 22; Mason, *Writings*, I, 144-148; Archibald Alexander, *Objections Obviated, and God Glorified* (Boston, 1830), pp. 10-13.

[77] Miller, *A Sermon . . .* (1799), pp. 27-28; Samuel Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century* (2 vols.; New York, 1803), II, 295-302; Romeyn, *Sermons*, I, 1-2, 60.

An incisive statement of the Presbyterian view concerning the prospects of the natural man is that of Philip Lindsly, pastor in Princeton and later president of Cumberland College. Lindsly contended, against the opinion that man was originally savage and by a gradual development of his own abilities became civilized, that it was "contradicted alike by reason, by revelation and by history." According to Lindsly, Adam was created fully mature and "taught immediately by his Maker every thing necessary for him to know." Adam lived "nearly a thousand years" and instructed his posterity in the arts of civilization, but after his death the process of degeneration began to work. "Man is prone to degeneracy; and when sunk to the lowest state of degradation, he remains stationary, until light from abroad dispels the darkness which envelops him." Pointing to history, Lindsly contended that "the world cannot produce an instance of a nation, a tribe, a family--or an individual who has ever emerged from the rudeness of savage life without any foreign or external aid; or without the instruction and example of those who were already civilized." Even after a nation had reached an advanced state of civilization, the greatest problem it faced, according to Lindsly, was "to keep up to the standard of excellence which has been already reached."[78]

By some Presbyterians this position was carried to the extreme of denying the possibility of scientific and literary advance by non-Christians. Romeyn was the most vocal in the expression of this idea, but the literary attainments of the Moslems and "Socinians" caused him some concern. He explained that while these seemed to contradict his position, the Moslems only became interested in learning after their contact with the Roman Empire. Even in what Romeyn considered to be a polluted form, Christianity still produced the Moslem improvement. The Moslems, Romeyn contended, were unable to make any advance over what they had borrowed and they soon degenerated into profound ignorance. The "Socinians" were only able to be learned because they were raised in Christian countries. Pointing to Copernicus, Bacon and Newton, Romeyn concluded that "It is under the auspices of revealed religion, that the most important discoveries have been made in the different departments of human knowledge." Under any other influence man had only been able to originate "preposterous and ridiculous theories."[79]

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[78] Philip Lindsly, An Address . . . (Nashville, 1825), pp. 4-7.

While all Presbyterians would not subscribe to this extreme statement, it was generally believed that there was some kind of direct relationship between Christianity and civilization. Christianity both demanded and promoted a state of civilization. The most obvious point of contemporary interest was in missions to the Indians. It was a deep conviction that the Indians would have to be Christianized before they could be civilized, but in practice the two went hand in hand. This was symbolized in the use of the one building as both schoolhouse and chapel. One Presbyterian missionary reported some Indian "conversions" in the following language.

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[79] Romeyn, Sermons, I, 126-132.

> George Colbert, a Chickasaw chief, called in a decent dress, and lodged here. He informed me how he and his brother Levi had laboured to further the pious and benevolent designs of the (missionary) society; that he, Levi, and a number of others, wish to learn good things: no get drunk, but work, make corn, cotton, cattle, hogs, etc.[80]

This statement cannot be construed to be that of a lesser figure who imperfectly conceived his task. It represents the Presbyterian view in action. In his inaugural address at the College of New Jersey, Ashbel Green declared that it was simply impossible to propagate Christianity without at the same time promoting learning.[81] Some latter-day Presbyterians doing honor to a former minister discovered something that they did not fully understand when they said of him, "Dr. M'Corkle spared no effort to make his congregation not only a religious people, but an intelligent people as well. Religious welfare and cultural knowledge in his estimation went hand in hand."[82]

The degree to which a connection between Christianity and all human progress was assumed may be seen in the cautious way that Samuel Miller stated his opposition to that extreme position. In writing his two volume survey of the developments of science and literature during the eighteenth century, Miller had come to appreciate some of the scientific work of non-Christians.

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[80] New York Missionary Magazine, and Repository of Religious Intelligence, 1800, I, p. 370.

[81] Ashbel Green, Discourses Delivered in the College of New Jersey (Philadelphia, 1822), p. 9.

[82] James F. Hurley and Julia Goode Eagan, The Prophet of Zion-Parnassus: Samuel Eusebius McCorkle (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1934), p. 92.

> Should any reader be offended by the language of panegyric which is frequently bestowed on the intellectual and scientific endowments of some distinguished abettors of heresy or of infidelity, he is entreated to remember that justice is due to all men. A man who is a bad Christian may be a very excellent mathematician, astronomer, or chemist. . . . It is proper to commiserate the mistakes of such persons, . . . but it is surely difficult to see either the justice or utility of withholding from them that praise of genius or of learning to which they are entitled.[83]

Although Miller was willing to grant far more to the unsanctified abilities of man than any of his colleagues,[84] he agreed wholeheartedly with them about the end result of man's striving. "Science . . . . when committed to the hands of depraved men, is liable to be deformed, abused, and converted from a blessing to a curse." Miller believed that it was the very progress of science which was not "regulated and directed by holy principles," that would lead to the state of degeneracy that would precede the millennium.[85]

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[83] Miller, A Brief Retrospect, I, xii-xiii.

[84] Green was also willing to admit that impious but learned persons had "occasionally appeared." See Green, Discourses, p. 9.

[85] Miller, A Sermon . . . (1798), pp. 16-18.

If the millennium would not be introduced by a miraculous reordering of nature or by the gradual improvement of natural man, it would come by man's being changed and regenerated by the Spirit of God. While regeneration was seen to be the exclusive work of the Holy Spirit, the Presbyterians believed that this act took place under certain predictable conditions which were suited both to the character of man and God. More importantly, these conditions could be created by teaching man the "knowledge of the Lord" which was contained in the Bible.

A concise statement of the general understanding of the process of regeneration is furnished by Archibald Alexander.

> We know . . . that the work of the Spirit, in the regeneration of the heart, is adapted to the rational nature of man. The thing to be accomplished is not the creation of some new faculty; it is a moral renovation; and all moral changes must be effected by understanding and choice. . . . Although piety in the heart is the effect of a divine operation, yet all its exercises take place agreeably to the common laws of our rational nature.[86]

This understanding of regeneration was based on the notion that man can be directed either by the passions or by reason. By some Presbyterians the rational nature of man was further divided into intellectual and moral elements, but these worked in harmony against the passions. While the passions or animal senses were not believed to be wicked in all forms, they became so if not subjected to the rational nature of man. Man's point of contact with God was in all cases through his rational nature.[87]

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[86] Archibald Alexander, "Essay on the Nature of Vital Piety," introductory essay to Jared Waterbury, Advice to a Young Christian (New York, 1843), p. 8.

Eliphalet Nott frequently turned to this theme in addressing the graduating classes at Union College. "Controul (sic) and subjugate your passions" was his first advice to the young men. Nott pointed out that when man was created, reason was at the helm and "the bosom of man was calm." But when man lost his innocence he became "blind and impetuous" under the rule of the passions. The senses provided some pleasure if properly restrained, but the "richest banquets" of the senses soon disgust. On the other hand, Nott saw rational endeavor as a "holy pleasure" which enabled man to know both science and the "invisible creation." In Nott's judgment, "The wretch who does not prefer it to the mere indulgence of the sense, though free of other crimes, evinces a depravity which merits eternal reprobation." It may come as a surprise at this point to note that Nott preferred the threefold division of man's nature. While affirming that the moral nature is the highest part of man, he concluded, "Your intellectual and moral nature, are what ally you to angels and assimilate you to God."[88]

The Presbyterians agreed that regeneration was "ultimately wrought on the heart" but it was further their conviction that "the understanding is unquestionably the avenue through which the heart is reached."[89] Man as rational being must be led to religious experience through reason. Any attempt to excite or produce religious experience through the "animal senses" or passions would inevitably lead man away from the end in view. According to Joseph Clark, "The more we suffer our enquires" on the true and false grounds of religion "to be directed by the pride and corrupt passions of the heart, the greater will be the danger of building our hopes on a foundation that must finally be swept away as a refuge of lies."[90]

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[87] Cf. Green, Discourses, pp. 6-12; Blair, Sermons, p. 95.

[88] Nott, Miscellaneous Works, pp. 3-6, 25-32.

If the "avenue" was the understanding, that which was to be understood was the "knowledge of the Lord." This phrase stood as the central expression for the accomplished millennium and as the primary method of reaching that goal. The passage of scripture most often quoted in connection with the coming millennium was Isaiah 11:9, "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." In direct proportion as this knowledge was extended over the world the millennium would be coming.

In its most general usage the "knowledge of the Lord" meant "an understanding, and reception of the whole scheme, and science of salvation."[91] More specifically it meant an understanding of God, man and Christ. While occasionally some other item was listed under this head, it always included these three. God must be known in all his "perfections." Man must be understood as depraved. The atonement of Christ must be recognized as the method in which God effected reconciliation with man. As used by the majority of Presbyterians the "knowledge of the Lord" was almost a synonym of the "system" of doctrines of the Westminster Confession.[92]

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[89] Dana, A Sermon . . . (1817), p. 3.

[90] Joseph Clark, "The True and False Grounds of Religion," The New Jersey Preacher, ed. by George S. Woodhull and Isaac V. Brown (Trenton, New Jersey, 1813), p. 263.

The "knowledge of the Lord" did indeed include a more intimate knowing of the Creator, but this "knowledge" could not be attained outside the intellectual framework stated above. A representative statement of the relationship between the two aspects of the "knowledge of the Lord" is that of Edward Griffin.

> The knowledge which I would recommend, though it included the speculation of the understanding, is not confined to it. It consists in a clear discernment of God's spiritual glory and in a holy intimacy with him; which can be obtained neither by a speculative without right affections, nor yet by warm affections without deep and extensive knowledge.[93]

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[91] Enoch Burt, "The Excellence of the Knowledge of Christ," The New Jersey Preacher, p. 361.

[92] For various treatments of this subject see Chester, A Sermon . . . (1813); Samuel Taggart, Knowledge Increased by Travelling to and fro, to Preach the Gospel (Northampton, Massachusetts, 1807); Dana, A Sermon . . . (1817); Ashbel Green, "The Efficacy of Divine Truth," The National Preacher, III (July, 1828), 17-28; Burt, "Excellence of the Knowledge"; Romeyn, Sermons, I, 397-420.

[93] Griffin, Sermons, I, 274.

Most Presbyterians would have agreed with Kollock, however, that "it is possible that a person may know the doctrines of Christianity and yet be unholy; but it is impossible that he should be entirely ignorant of them, and yet be holy."[94]

The extent to which the priority of a rational understanding was stressed is illustrated by the way in which Kollock interpreted several conversion experiences in the New Testament. In the instance of Paul, Kollock was puzzled as to how Paul could so quickly come to know the "whole system of Christianity," which of course he considered essential to conversion. Kollock concluded that it had been a miracle. Paul's mind had been "instantaneously infused." Kollock hastened to say that since miracle was no longer to be expected, it was now necessary to study in order to acquire that knowledge. Kollock placed the same construction on the mass conversions at Pentecost and affirmed that Christian education now replaced that kind of miracle although it could not guarantee conversion.[95]

An intellectual understanding of the "doctrines" or "system" of Christianity, the "knowledge of the Lord," also implied a correctness of sentiment. The Presbyterians did not hesitate to affirm that what was understood must correspond to the "truth" before it could produce the desired change in man. It was believed that any improper or incorrect intellectual apprehension of Christianity would invariably lead to immoral behavior and incorrect religious practice. The statement of this position by John Chester would have been widely accepted. "As the views which we possess . . . must have a governing influence, over all our sentiments, and conduct; it is absolutely essential that those views be correct."[96]

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[94] Kollock, Sermons, IV, 300.

[95] Ibid., II, 450; IV, 198-200. See also his discussion of regeneration, II, 154-159.

Understood in this fashion, the extension of the "knowledge of the Lord" was to bring about the millennium. This was believed to be "the only effectual cure for moral depravity: the only system of truth that can purify the polluted recesses of the heart, that can curb irregular appetites, and restrain the impetuosity of passion."[97] Since the actual moral change of man was the work of the Holy Spirit, in the Presbyterian view, the task of Christians in producing the millennial bliss was to instruct man in the "knowledge of the Lord." As Green explained it, the Holy Spirit renovates man through the "instrumentality" of revealed truth, which "gains entry into the mind by several modes or methods of introduction." Among those things listed by Green were reading or listening to the Bible, listening to preaching, reading "pious" books and catechetical instruction.[98]

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[96] Chester, A Sermon . . . (1813), p. 12. The best full length statement of this position was that of Samuel Stanhope Smith, "The Connexion of Principle with Practice, or the Duty of Maintaining Sound Evangelic Principles in the Church," appended to A Comprehensive View, pp. 519-543.

[97] Miller, A Sermon . . . (1798), p. 42.

Of these modes of introducing revealed truth to the mind, the Presbyterians preferred Bible reading and preaching, and the spread of the Bible and the growth of the ministry became symbols of the approaching millennium. Thus Arthur Stansbury could declare confidently, "If ever our hopes of (the millennium) are to be realized, the Bible must be spread far and wide. From the Bible's light must dawn this jubilee of the world."[99] But before the Bible could make its full impact it was necessary that all men be able to read it. Every advance in popular education, therefore, was viewed as a step toward the millennium. This idea coincided with the emphasis on the connection of Christianity and civilization, thus reinforcing the belief that religion and human culture, especially education, were closely related.[100]

The expectation of an entire populace reading the Bible for themselves, however, did not detract from the necessity of the ministry. Even though Ashbel Green, for example, could encourage his congregation to check his teaching against the Bible, it was his established opinion that "the mass of mankind cannot, and they are sensible that they cannot, decide for themselves on controverted points, which involve facts beyond their power to investigate."[101] In the final analysis the ministry would be the supreme agency in diffusing the "knowledge of the Lord."

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[98] Green, "Efficacy of Divine Truth," pp. 18, 21.

[99] Arthur J. Stansbury, _The Christian Duty of Spreading the Scriptures_ (New York, 1814), p. 10.

[100] For examples of a belief in the close relationship between the progress of education and the advancement of the millennium see How, _A Sermon . . ._ (1825), pp. 19-20; George Bush, _Lack of Vision the Ruin of the People_ (Indianapolis, 1826), p. 16; Blythe, _Portrait of the Times_, p. 28; Hillyer, _A Sermon . . ._ (1823), pp. 11-12; Taggart, _Knowledge Increased_, p. 5; Romeyn, _Sermons_, I, 7-10.

> As a gospel ministry has been the constant mean (sic) which divine providence has seen fit to use, for the diffusing and increasing of christian knowledge, both at the first establishment of Christianity, and in every later period of the churche's (sic); so whenever the whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, it will be effected by the same means.[102]

Although the primary figure in bringing about the millennium was the minister, the layman was expected to lend his support to the total effort. It was still believed that it was the "prerogative" and "glory" of God "to bring . . . a kingdom of the greatest holiness and felicity out of beings totally depraved," but God had chosen to work through man and would do so to produce the millennium.[103] As Eliphalet Nott reminded the General Assembly, "No new method . . . is to be expected," the millennium must be produced by the "exertion of believers."[104] In spite of the emphasis on man's inability to better himself, the millennium elicited the full participation of man and served effectively as an incentive to greater action.

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[101] Green, Discourses, p. 17; Lectures on the Shorter Catechism, pp. 6-8.

[102] Taggart, Knowledge Increased, p. 20.
This discussion emphasizes the educational aspect of the ministry more than has usually been done in more general treatments. Sidney Mead, for example, says of this period, "Chief among the activities of the church which defined the common ground of the ministry was the conversion of souls." The difficulty with attempting to place the Presbyterians in this category, at least prior to 1826, is illustrated by the fact that Mead cites no Presbyterian source from this early period, although there is probably more Presbyterian literature on this subject than on any other. See "The Rise of the Evangelical Conception of the Ministry in America: 1607-1850," The Ministry in Historical Perspectives, ed. by H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), pp. 207-249, 310-314. Cf. Elwyn Allen Smith, The Presbyterian Ministry in American Culture: A Study in Changing Concepts, 1700-1900 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 138-161.

V

The doctrine of providence, the American Corollary and the vision of the millennium served as a network of religious symbols in terms of which the Presbyterians responded to the development of the new nation. While providence had become largely rationalized due to its transformation under the influence of Witherspoon and Smith, it continued to function as a religious symbol through retaining at least the framework of a conception for the government of God. By incorporating the Princeton teachings, moreover, the doctrine actually became functional in a way that would have been impossible for the older version in the American environment. The flexibility of the symbol was further demonstrated by its ability to substantiate those liberties which were deemed valuable by all Americans. The millennium was the supreme symbol which subsumed the others and pointed Americans toward a paradise on earth.

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[103] Miller, _A Sermon . . ._ (1798), p. 33.

[104] Nott, _Miscellaneous Works_, p. 159.

Providence and the American Corollary provided the directives for American national life. The millennium reinforced these, specifying the proper methods for accomplishing these ends, and serving as an incentive to action. The "association between Religion and Patriotism" demanded by the coming together of providence and liberty into the American Corollary was reinforced by the decidedly theocratic character of the millennial vision. While the American Corollary underscored the necessity of national recognition of God, Christian rulers, and Christian laws promoted and enforced by public opinion, the millennium determined that public opinion should be molded by the "knowledge of the Lord" taught by a church at least progressing toward union.

At the same time these religious ideals were most universally shared by Presbyterians, the whole of American life seemed to be moving in an opposite direction. While the Presbyterians were declaring the connection between the welfare of the nation and its religious posture which demanded the "association between Religion and Patriotism," the civil government of that nation was rapidly disassociating itself from all religious considerations. While the Presbyterians were calling for a homogenous and unified religion, the denominations were multiplying at a pace that would make America into an even more religiously heterogeneous nation. While the Presbyterians proclaimed the inability of man to accomplish anything substantial apart from Christianity, the American was becoming fascinated with his own ability to conquer the continental wilderness and this encouraged him to toy with the idea that perhaps he could control his own destiny as well. Perhaps the most devastating of all, while the Presbyterians were placing their confidence in the power of the "knowledge of the Lord" which presupposed religious education, the nation was about to elect a man to its highest office who claimed that even the least educated were capable of guiding the nation, and many religious people in that nation were convinced that the most illiterate among them could explain the mysteries of God if only he were converted.

If the tension between the facts of American life and the religious goals were to be resolved, decisive action would be required of the Presbyterians. This command to action, explicit in the vision of the millennium, would have to be met with concerted or institutional activity efficient enough to transform at least a respectable majority of the American populace. As the symbols of providence and millennium served as directives for American life, they also indicated the nature of the institution which would perform the task. The church was obviously the medium through which the Presbyterians would necessarily act to influence the nation. But the American environment, which had produced a unique political order, had also fundamentally altered the structures of institutional religious life. Severed from the civil government, the church had lost its institutional link with the total political and social life of the nation and had been reduced to a plurality of institutions called denominations. This was in itself contrary to the Presbyterian goals in light of the millennial vision of a unified church. The second part of this thesis is an attempt to demonstrate how the Presbyterians sought to implement their religious goals in American life, and the effects of these attempts on the structure of religious institutions.

PART II

THE NATION AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

CHAPTER IV

THE DENOMINATION

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Presbyterians who felt the need for decisive and fruitful action in order to secure the providential prosperity of the nation and usher in the millennium found themselves burdened by an unresponsive denominational organization that seemed inadequate at best. It was believed that the requirements of the doctrine of providence and the vision of the millennium could only be met by the erection of numerous new churches and the training of an even greater number of "pious" ministers to instruct 13,000,000 Americans in "the knowledge of the Lord." The denominational institution which had been reorganized in 1788, was designed primarily to regulate the religious life and promote the uniformity of doctrine and morals of 17,000 members and 177 ministers. As the incentives to action on a national level grew in intensity the Presbyterians made several attempts to mold a more aggressive and efficient organization, in the process of which the institution lost its integrity as a cohesive body except for the structure of its internal government. During the same period Presbyterians of all descriptions helped establish and supported voluntary associations to perform functions desired by the denomination but which could not easily be done through the denominational organization. These various maneuvers prior to 1826 formed the backdrop of experience for the formulation of the concept of denominationalism which has become distinctive of American Protestantism.

The prevailing dissatisfaction with the denominational efforts to promote the goals of providence and millennium was voiced pointedly by John Holt Rice in the opening sermon before the General Assembly of 1820. Using as a text Romans 14:19, "Let us therefore follow after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another," Rice made an elegant plea that the necessary ecclesiastical business of the judicatory be carried on with harmony and dispatch so that the General Assembly could focus primarily on those things that would "edify" the nation.

Without pointing to any specific issues, either of doctrine or discipline, Rice suggested several general attitudes that he believed led to internal disunity and consequently retarded more important national concerns. Among those things listed were 1) that men forget their "liability to error," 2) "the love of distinction and influence" and 3) "party-spirit."[1] Beyond the promotion of a harmonious spirit, Rice felt that there was a need to change both the nature and the method of management of the concerns of the various judicatories but especially of the General Assembly. Concerning the latter, Rice observed that "many matters . . . are taken up first by the House . . . , seized by the wrong end, and discussed in a confused and irregular manner, so as utterly to baffle men of weak minds and slow apprehension."[2] He felt that these items could be more judiciously handled by committees. But the very nature of the business attended to was of more immediate importance to Rice. He announced that the object of his sermon was "to bring home to the bosom of every member of the house the conviction that this is no place for little things and narrow interests."[3]

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[1] John Holt Rice, A Discourse . . . (Philadelphia, 1820), pp. 5-11.

While Rice's criticism of the existing situation was somewhat vague, there was no doubt about the direction in which he wished to move.

> Although the Presbyterian church is now large, and growing, all know that the numbers of our ministers bear a very small proportion to the population, on which we might exert an influence. Of course our personal influence as a body of men is comparatively small. We are making great, and ought to make much greater exertions to remedy this evil. From the nature of the case however the process is slow: and the people whom we might edify, and ought to edify, are in the mean time exposed to many sinister and disastrous designs. It does seem to me then, that while convened in General

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[2] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

> Assembly, we ought to improve the opportunity afforded of bringing the talents and intelligence of the gifted geniuses and learned men among us, to bear on all our members, and exert a continual influence on society.[4]

It is not without significance that Rice emphasized the production of literature which would "subserve the interests of evangelical truth" as the most feasible plan for extending the influence of the Presbyterians. Voicing the general Presbyterian optimism about the power and influence of literature, Rice declared that this was the best way to "exert a continual influence" and "give to ourselves a sort of pluri-presence, that in a considerable degree may compensate for the paucity of our numbers."[5]

The more important item for the present discussion, however, was Rice's desire to see the ecclesiastical machinery of Presbyterianism brought to bear on the life of the nation. It was his conviction that anything not having that effect should be avoided.[6] If such a change could be made in the General Assembly, it would have repercussions throughout the organization, as that body gave to the whole denomination its "tone and colouring." Rice was convinced that if properly directed, "Eight hundred Presbyterian ministers, supported by their congregations, may produce mighty effects in such a nation as ours."[7]

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[4] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[5] Ibid., pp. 17-19.

[6] Ibid., p. 5.

[7] Ibid., p. 23.

Rice was not alone in his opinions, and at that very period there were plans in the making for changing the general tone of the Presbyterian judicatories which came to fruition in a revision of the Constitution adopted in 1821. In light of this, a statement by Rice in a letter to his niece may reflect more than an indulging of his own ego. He reported that "I have happened in my sermon greatly to please all parties in the General Assembly. . . . I never got so much blarney in all my life perhaps, as I have in the last week. If these things can hurt me, I shall come home quite a swaggering fellow."[8]

If Rice found movement toward "edifying" the nation through the denominational structures to be "from the nature of the case . . . slow," it was because those very structures had been designed primarily "for the better management of the churches."[9] The Presbyterian denomination was completely reorganized in a series of measures which culminated in 1788 when the Synod of New York and Philadelphia adopted "The Form of the Government and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America." This document, together with the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, all slightly revised, the "Forms of Process" and "The Directory for Worship," formed a corpus of material known as the Constitution of the Presbyterian

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[8] Quoted in Maxwell, Memoir of John H. Rice, p. 180.

[9] Trinterud, Forming of an American Tradition, p. 283.

Church in the United States of America. This constitution, as will be demonstrated below, was designed almost solely for the internal government of the denomination. When it became necessary to exert more pressure on American society in pursuit of the goals of the doctrine of providence and the vision of the millennium, the denominational organization governed by the Constitution could not be adapted easily to those activities.

There were several factors at work during the 1780's which produced such a narrowly defined concept of the denomination. The first of these was the belief that the United States was a Christian nation whose policy and laws would conform to the standards of Christianity taught by the major existing denominations. This presupposition was accepted as fact and found explicit statement in the Constitution, which declared, "And if at any time the civil power should think it proper to appoint a fast or thanksgiving, it is the duty of the ministers and people of our communion, as we live under a christian government, to pay all due respect to the same."[10]

Implicit in this thinking was the idea that in some way Protestant Christianity, as distinguished from any single denominational expression of that religion, was to be the "established" religion of America. Having noted the content of the expression "nursing fathers" in the previous chapter,[11] the revision of the Westminster Confession concerning civil magistrates gives expression to the idea of an informal establishment. Having affirmed that civil magistrates have no religious jurisdiction, the revision continues, "Yet as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians. . . ."[12] As Sidney Mead has observed of the 1780's, "There was as yet little indication and less awareness that the church patterns of America would be markedly different from those of Europe."[13]

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[10] Constitution, pp. 467-468.

Since the rapidly developing historical situation soon belied these presuppositions there was never a theoretical or practical demonstration of how the system was to function. A letter from the first General Assembly to the recently elected Washington, however, breaths this spirit. After reciting the providential formula, "Public virtue is the most certain means of public felicity; and religion is the surest basis of virtue," the Presbyterians praised Washington as an "avowed friend of the Christian religion; who has commenced his administration in rational and exalted sentiments of piety; . . . and on the most public and solemn occasions, devoutly acknowledges the government of Divine Providence." While entertaining the hope that such an example would have the "most happy consequences," the Presbyterians promised "to add the wholesome instructions of religion. . . . to render men sober, honest, and industrious citizens." But this important function was not to be the work of Presbyterians alone.

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[11] Supra, pp. 122-123.

[12] Constitution, pp. 115-116.

[13] Mead, Lively Experiment, p. 107.

> In these pious labours, we hope to imitate the most worthy of our brethren of other Christian denominations, and to be imitated by them; assured that if we can, by mutual and generous emulation, promote truth and virtue, we shall render a great and important service to the republic; shall receive encouragement from every wise and good citizen; and, above all, meet the approbation of our Divine Master.[14]

Thus, at the time of the reorganization, the Presbyterians envisioned themselves and "the most worthy of our brethren," meaning primarily those of the Reformed tradition, as serving collectively in the capacity of a state church. Under this impression there was no necessity of creating a denominational organization essentially different from those in Europe. When one compares "The Form of Government and Discipline" devised by the American Presbyterians with that of the established Church of Scotland, also presbyterian in internal government, the difference is of detail rather than basic design, function, or structure.[15] While this is not to deny the Americanness of the document, it does emphasize clearly that at this time it was not believed necessary to have any part of the denomination particularly designed to "edify" the nation.

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[14] MGA, I, 12.

[15] Church of Scotland, The Confession of Faith (Glasgow, 1752), pp. 507-538; cf. Trinterud, Forming of an American Tradition, pp. 283-291.

The Presbyterians of 1788 were of the opinion that they could do most to influence the nation by maintaining the doctrinal and moral integrity of their own denomination. This belief is reflected in a letter from the first General Assembly to the four newly created synods.

> The dignity of our church, its weight and influence in the United States, and even the utility of its ordinances, to the great ends of religion, will depend much on the unity of our counsels; and on the order and efficiency of our government. While the interest of religion ought to be our first and ruling object, we ought not to forget how necessary it is, for that great purpose, to preserve our character as a body, and our consequence in the republic, in comparison with other denominations of Christians.[16]

This restricted view of the denomination was current among Presbyterians at the time of their reorganization. The denomination was virtually defined exclusively in terms of church government, which would include control over doctrine and discipline. Significantly this view was the focus of the opening sermon before the meeting of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia which adopted the Constitution. Jedediah Chapman, moderator of 1788, declared, "Nor can I join with those who think it necessary to reduce the church of Christ to one denomination, and make it subject to one form of government." At another point he made the same equation, "We dare not deny that there are churches of

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[16] MGA, I, 9-10; cf. pp. 46-47.

Christ of different denominations, and under different forms of government." While Chapman believed that it was both necessary and possible to keep the "unity of spirit" with other denominations, he emphasized the need for a vigilant internal government "in order to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" within the denomination. It was especially necessary to this end that "great care should be taken with regard to the admission of members."[17]

The development from this concept of the denomination as primarily signifying internal church government to the idea of a denomination with a complex organization designed purposefully to influence or give direction to the national life in addition to internal concerns came only after several decades of trial and error during which a major Presbyterian concern was to find an institution that would allow the type of cooperation envisioned by this restricted concept of a denomination.

A second factor which produced an intense concern with internal church government was the fact of religious liberty in America. As has been demonstrated, the significance of this for Presbyterians was that religion, the church, was now free from the control of civil government and free to conform as near as possible to the Scriptural ideal. In the revised version of the Westminster Confession the sentence following the one designating magistrates as "nursing fathers" of the church, declares that, "as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth, should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof."[18] The Presbyterians were at complete liberty to organize their denomination in line with what they believed to be the will of God.

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[17] Quoted in Charles H. Dayton and John Garth Coleman, A Brief History of the Presbytery of Geneva (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Cushing-Malloy, Inc., 1955), p. 29.

That the Presbyterians recognized the uniqueness of the situation and determined to use it to best advantage is illustrated in the introduction to "The Form of Government and Discipline," which was written to "make the several parts of the system plain." After declaring in the first paragraph that "they consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable," the founding fathers of modern Presbyterianism indicated the implications of this for their task of reorganization.

> That, in perfect consistency with the above principle of common right, every Christian church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its *communion* and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ hath appointed: That, in the exercise of this right, they may, notwithstanding, err, in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow: yet, even in this case, they do not infringe upon the liberty, or the rights of others, but only make an improper use of their own.[19]

This emphasis on internal government, which reflected

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[18] *Constitution*, p. 116.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 372.

both contemporary theory and desire, was embodied in the Constitution and exemplified in the early practice of the denominational judicatories. The denomination was organized in a pyramidal fashion with the church sessions forming the broad base, the presbyteries above them, the synods next, and the General Assembly at the apex. The Constitution defined the general tone of these bodies in the following language. "They possess the right of requiring obedience to the laws of Christ; and of excluding the disobedient and disorderly, from the privileges of the church."[20] Even the general name for the segments of the denomination, "judicatories," illustrates the intended function of these assemblies. Since the Presbyterians considered the Scriptures as the "only rule of faith and manners," the denominational bodies were not to legislate, but confine their activity to "judging upon laws already made."[21]

The church session was made up of the minister of the congregation and at least two elders. The primary function of this body was the "spiritual government of the congregation" which meant not only hearing cases of discipline brought before it but actively inquiring into the "knowledge and christian conduct of the members of that church."[22] Since the session was primarily a local ecclesiastical court, the Constitution provided a separate section, the "Forms of Process," to govern these proceedings.[23] When a trial issued in a censure, the "Directory for Worship" detailed the necessary steps for eventual restoration which would culminate in a ceremony before the entire congregation.[24]

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[20] Ibid., p. 384.

[21] Ibid., pp. 373-374.

[22] Ibid., p. 385.

The presbytery, made up of all the ministers and an elder from each church within a given district, was the vital body in presbyterial government. As defined in the Constitution, the functions of the presbytery were as follows.

> The presbytery have cognizance of all things, that regard the welfare of the particular churches within their bounds, which are not cognizable by the session. They have also a power of receiving and issuing appeals from the sessions, and references, brought before them in an orderly manner; of examining and licensing candidates for the gospel ministry; of ordaining, settling, removing or judging ministers; of examining, and approving or censuring the records of the sessions; of resolving questions of doctrine or discipline, seriously and reasonably proposed; of condemning erroneous opinions, that injure the purity or peace of the church; of visiting particular churches, to enquire into their state and redress the evils that may have arisen within them; of uniting, or dividing congregations, at the request of the people; and of ordering whatever pertains to the spiritual concerns of the churches under their care.[25]

While no small part of the duties of the presbytery was as an appeals court and oversight of the congregations, its primary function was the government and regulation of the ministry.

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[23] Ibid., pp. 427-431.

[24] Ibid., pp. 453-459.

[25] Ibid., pp. 388-390.

The task of licensing and ordaining ministers, which required an oversight of their education, was taken seriously and the Constitution provided detailed direction for these matters.[26] In addition, the "Forms of Process" contained a section to guide the disciplinary proceedings with relation to ministers.[27]

The synod formed a less central or vital link in the system of internal government. These bodies served as appeals courts from the presbyteries and were to review all action in the presbyteries, "redressing whatever hath been done by presbyteries contrary to order." They could also make regulations "for the benefit of their whole body" which were not contradictory to the actions of the General Assembly. Finally they could make recommendations to the General Assembly.[28]

The General Assembly was the "highest judicatory of the presbyterian church" and was made up of an equal number of ministers and elders from the presbyteries on a representative basis. This body was the final court of appeal, reviewed the action of the synods, gave advice and instruction on controversial points, and served as "the bond of union, peace, correspondence, and mutual confidence, among all (the) churches." The General Assembly, however, did not possess unlimited power. The Constitution stipulated that "Before any overtures or regulations, proposed by the assembly to be established as standing rules, shall be obligatory on the churches, it shall be necessary to transmit them to all the presbyteries, and to receive the returns of, at least, a majority of the presbyteries, in writing, approving thereof."[29] Although this last provision was later slightly altered by replacing "standing rules" with "constitutional rules," this restriction on the power of the General Assembly contributed to the sluggishness with which the denomination responded to the requirements of the doctrine of providence and vision of the millennium. In the absence of "constitutional rules," the assembly was forced into a policy of recommendation in those programs designed to meet these demands.[30]

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[26] Ibid., pp. 397-416.

[27] Ibid., pp. 431-435.

[28] Ibid., p. 392.

While this brief sketch of the denominational organization is sufficient to indicate that on a theoretical level the structure was designed basically for the internal government of the denomination, the early practice of the various judicatories conformed in large measure to the theory. The numerous and lengthy church trials, both of laymen and ministers, the meticulous examination of ministerial candidates, and other actions of these judicatories form an interesting story, but the focus of attention must be turned to those attempts by these judicatories to become more aggressive bodies.[31]

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[29] Ibid., pp. 393-395.

[30] MGA, I, 180, 190, 236, 255, 264, 287, 298.

While the denominational organization was thus primarily directed toward internal government, there was some consideration given to church expansion. In the Constitution, between the chapters "Of Resigning a Pastoral Charge" and "Of Moderators," appears a chapter of a single page, "Of Missions." Even at this point, however, the Constitution is inward-looking. The primary concern is with supplying vacancies in already existing churches by ministers from other presbyteries. Such "missionaries" should "be ready to produce his credentials to the presbytery or presbyteries, through the bounds of which he may pass." After this appear the following ten lines, which were to serve as the constitutional basis for all missionary endeavors.

> And the general assembly may, of their own knowledge, send missions to any part to plant churches, or to supply vacancies: And, for this purpose, may direct any presbytery to ordain evangelists, or ministers without relation to particular churches: Provided always, that such missions be made with the consent of the parties appointed; and that the judicatory sending them make the necessary provision for their support and reward in the performance of this service.[32]

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[31] For the practice of the early judicatories the following printed works are useful. Most of them contain either extracts or full minutes of various judicatories. Sweet, Presbyterians; William Henry Foote, Sketches of North Carolina (New York, 1846); D. I. Craig, A History of the Development of the Presbyterian Church in North Carolina (Richmond: Whittset and Shepperson, 1907); William J. Cumming, The Presbyterian Church within the Field of the Presbytery of Westchester (Hartford, 1889); Samuel John Ellis Eaton, History of the Presbytery of Erie (New York, 1868); William J. Gibson, History of the Presbytery of Huntingdon (Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, 1874); Joseph Smith, Old Redstone; or Historical Sketches of Western Presbyterianism (Philadelphia, 1854).

[32] Constitution, p. 417.

This was the total provision for expansion. There was no directive in the Constitution for the organization of new churches by the presbyteries. There was no provision for the formation of new presbyteries by synods. The General Assembly was empowered to establish new synods, no doubt because of the current interest in the legality of the creation of four synods from the original one.[33] Needless to say, the Presbyterian denomination grew in spite of its Constitution, but the lack of theoretical guidance often led to impromptu decisions which had unknown ramifications and heightened the possibility of dispute within the denomination.

II

Even though the denominational organization was thus basically inward-looking in theory, the early years of development gave every indication that the structure could take on a more aggressive nature. The first General Assembly recognized the necessity of a central fund to carry on mission work and, contrary to the Constitution, ordered the presbyteries to collect money and send it to the assembly.[34] The intimate connection between this action and the doctrine of providence was pointed out in a letter of 1793 which was designed to increase these funds. The Assembly announced that, "They, who, as patriotic citizens, regard the prosperity of their country, will be anxious to diffuse the principles of the gospel, so favourable to that prosperity."[35] The Assembly of 1794 emphasized this connection by declaring that as a result of the missionary enterprise, "The rising generation may . . . be more carefully educated and better instructed in the principles of Christianity, civil order may be promoted, the political virtues enforced, the interests of Christ's kingdom advanced, and immortal beings prepared for eternal happiness."[36] One can not fail to note in this statement that the method of providence, "carefully educated and better instructed," was an integral part of the task.

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[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 389, 392, 395; cf. the revised edition (Elizabethtown, New Jersey: Mervin Hale, 1821), pp. 360, 362.

[34] MGA, I, 10-11.

For all the importance attached to missions, however, the Presbyterian denominational efforts in this area prior to 1802 could best be described as insignificant, or from the Presbyterian point of view, disappointing. Clifford Drury, who has written a comprehensive history of Presbyterian "national" missions, required only fourteen pages to cover the whole period from 1562 to 1802.[37] The first General

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[35] _Ibid_., 75.

[36] _Ibid_., 84.

[37] Clifford Merrill Drury, _Presbyterian Panorama: One Hundred and Fifty Years of National Missions History_ (Philadelphia: Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1952), pp. 3-17.

Assembly asked each synod to recommend two members to be appointed as missionaries. This would have produced eight missionaries, but only two could be secured and those for only three months each.[38] A committee of missions in 1797 reported that many of the men who had been chosen as missionaries had not attempted the work and that others had labored for only a part of the assigned time. To this was added, "The committee on the missionary business report that they have not been able to discover any persons suitable for the office of missionaries, except Mr. Thatcher, before recommended." This lone missionary died before completing his missionary tour.[39] The few who actually became missionaries were pastors of established congregations who were appointed to travel through designated areas for a few months. These men preached, administered the sacraments, acquired missionary intelligence, and occasionally organized a church but were rarely able to visit a given location more than once on each tour.

The missionary efforts of the General Assembly were augmented by those of the Synod of the Carolinas and the Synod of Virginia. In 1791 these synods had secured the permission of the General Assembly to carry on missionary activity in their respective territories. Each appointed a "Commission of Synod" which was to direct missionary work.

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[38] MGA, I, 10-11, 45.

[39] *Ibid.*, 128, 139.

Since these commissions were empowered to collect funds, appoint missionaries and act between the sessions of the synods, they represented a stage of organizational development that the General Assembly did not achieve until 1802 when it appointed a Standing Committee of Missions which operated in the same fashion. Even under these circumstances, however, the two synods were not able to prosecute mission work with any more success than the General Assembly. The Synod of the Carolinas, in fact, suspended missionary activity from 1796 to 1801. In the long run, synodical missions of this sort were destined to oblivion. In 1807 the Synod of Virginia asked the General Assembly to take over their missions. While this request was refused, a similar one by the Synod of the Carolinas was granted in 1812. As will become evident below, the future of missions at this level was to be done not by the synod but by missionary societies coextensive with the synod, or by societies with no connection to the synod.[40]

While the Presbyterians were aware that their methods were not altogether suited to the demands, they were not discouraged. The General Assembly of 1799, which had appointed a committee "to report a plan for the better prosecuting the business of missions,"[41] expressed their optimism in millennial terms. The pastoral letter of that year affirmed that "the favourable reports of our missionaries . . . afford rational ground to believe that the appropriations of the voluntary contributions . . . for the benevolent purpose of extending the means of religious instruction . . . will prove satisfactory." In light of the situation of the "nations of the world" did it not appear that "God was arising to shake terribly the earth?"[42] The nearness of the millennium was never an excuse for relaxation, but the reverse.

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[40] Ibid., 38, 43-44, 59, 67, 224, 238, 287, 290-291, 377, 380, 508; Foote, Sketches of North Carolina, pp. 285, 287, 290-291, 304. Foote includes the minutes of the Synod of the Carolinas from 1788 to 1812.

The report of the 1799 committee to facilitate missionary activity made no significant contribution, but another event of the same year was to produce greater results. On March 28, 1799 the Trustees of the General Assembly were incorporated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,[43] thus giving the Assembly a legal basis for the control of funds. The trustees presented to the General Assembly of 1800 a general program for the extension of Christianity throughout the nation, along with suggestions for how to raise the necessary money. While this program was never fully adopted by the General Assembly, it contained most of the elements which later came to characterize a multitude of voluntary societies.

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[41] MGA, I, 172.

[42] _Ibid._, 177-178.

[43] _Ibid._, 173-177.

The General Assembly agreed that from the trustees' suggestions several objects "deserve consideration." The first was the "gospelizing" of the Indians and a plan for their civilization "the want of which it is believed has been a great cause of the failure of former attempts to spread Christianity among them." The second object was the "instruction of the negroes, the poor, and those who are destitute of the means of grace." The third suggestion was for "The purchasing and disposing of Bibles, and also books and short essays on the great principles of religion and morality." The fourth called for "the provision of a fund for the more complete instruction of candidates for the gospel ministry, previously to their licensure."[44]

Concerning the second recommendation, religious instruction for all those in the nation "destitute of the means of grace," the assembly suggested the possibility of instituting an "order of catechists." These men, who would not have the education necessary for the ministry, could offer private religious instruction and lead devotional exercises "with a view to prepare the way for a few regular and ordained ministers to follow them, to organize churches and administer ordinances." While not ministers, these functionaries would be examined and recommended by the presbyteries and work under their direction. This program of activity was not to be viewed as replacing missionary work but "to be considered as additional to it."[45]

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[44] Ibid., 195-196.

The General Assembly also gave some consideration "as to the means and methods by which the funds necessary to the compassing of these objects may be provided." The first suggestion was a continuation of the annual contributions from the churches and presbyteries. Realizing the inadequacy of this the Assembly proposed that a number of agents be appointed to travel through the country and solicit funds. Next they saw the possibility of securing large gifts from "persons of property, piety and benevolence," either through "testamentary bequests" or "unsolicited donations." Finally, the Assembly believed that "It is not impossible, nor perhaps improbable, that if experience should demonstrate the practicability and utility of the measures contemplated, the people of the Presbyterian denomination might generally be persuaded to make an annual donation (say of twenty-five cents each)."[46]

There is in this report the essence of the entire program that was launched to make the American nation conform to the requirements of the doctrine of providence and the vision of the millennium. But this program was not to be implemented through the Presbyterian denomination. In ordering these statements published so that "the judicatories and people at large . . . may be acquainted with the views and wishes of their highest judicature," the Assembly made the following comment.

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[45] Ibid., 196-197.

[46] Ibid., 196.

> But the Assembly neither judge it expedient themselves to attempt to carry into immediate effect all that is here suggested, nor to urge on their judicatures and people to attempt it. Some things only that are here specified will be entered on by this Assembly; and the judicatures and people will judge for themselves what other objects it may be proper for them voluntarily to regard.[47]

What the Assembly meant by "voluntarily to regard" is not clear. What is clear, however, is that the program suggested was attempted, not through the denominational judicatories, but through a system of voluntary societies formed specifically to carry out a single phase of the program. In this report are clearly the germs of the missionary, Bible, tract and education societies, with the Sunday school unions reflecting a revised version of the "order of catechists." While this would take in the "frontier" the references to the "poor" also indicate an initial concern with the cities.

Voluntary societies for missionary and related purposes had already been formed with the support of individual Presbyterians and the approval of the General Assembly. When the General Association of Connecticut informed the General Assembly in 1798 that it had formed itself into a missionary society, the Assembly replied by referring to its own efforts and pointing to the establishment of interdenominational missionary societies in Albany and New York, and a further one contemplated for Philadelphia.[48] It was these and similar associations that became the primary institutions for Presbyterian efforts to Christianize the nation. The positive reasons why Presbyterians chose to work through this kind of institution rather than the denomination will be drawn out in Chapter V, but it should be indicated at this point that the voluntary societies were believed to be more nearly suited to meet the "national" requirements of the doctrine of providence and the vision of the millennium. In addition, there were several considerations, of a more practical nature, which made the denomination a secondary institution for the promotion of these activities.

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[47] *Ibid.*, 197.

In the first place, the task of internal government for which the structures had been created occupied a large portion of the time and energy of the various judicatories, produced disharmony, and thereby made the denomination less efficient as an institution for united action designed to affect the nation.

In the second place, the Presbyterians in their denominational capacities concentrated their efforts on missions and the education of ministers, and relied on the voluntary societies to carry on the other elements of the program announced in 1800. This is a point which requires no further illustration.[49] Finally, in these two areas the denomination was constantly faced with frustration at two points. Its efforts were inadequate to the needs and its organization was unsuited to greater exertion. In the meantime Presbyterians were giving their support to other institutions which inevitably drained off possible sources of leadership and financial aid. But the majority of Presbyterians during this period did not feel that the denomination was in competition with these other institutions. The desire was to press every available resource into service. Thus the Presbyterians attempted to make their own organization more effective. Accordingly there was a tendency to go outside the existing structures by creating new ones along the lines of the voluntary associations. These maneuvers worked to destroy the coherence of the original hierarchical structure so that the judicatories functioned more like autonomous societies than links in the chain of a larger integrated organization. By the 1820's the strictly denominational efforts had become nearly indistinguishable from those of the voluntary associations.

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[48] Ibid., 146-147.

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[49] *Ibid.*, 309, 402, 420, 430, 443, 483, 498, 529, 555.

III

Since the denominational organization had been set up primarily for internal government, it is not surprising that this occupied most of the time of the various judicatories. When the programs designed to fulfill the requirements of the doctrine of providence and the vision of the millennium came to be matters of denominational concern, the problems of internal government had themselves become difficult and this interfered with action toward accomplishing the larger goals. The attempt to enforce a uniform discipline among both ministers and members proved to be a difficult and trying task in the American context. A person suspended from one church could easily become a member of another in a different denomination and often in a different Presbyterian congregation.[50] Dissatisfaction on a large scale always raised the possibility of schism, the most conspicuous case being that of the Cumberland Presbyterians. Ministers did not occupy a status of unquestioned authority and often the American thought it a part of his liberty to be a member of the church in full communion regardless of his behavior. This problem seemed to grow in intensity with the wealth of the communicant concerned.[51]

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[50] See for example, Presbytery of New Castle, An Address . . . (1785); Stansbury, God Pleading with America, pp. 11-12; Guthrie, John McMillan, p. 61; Colin McIver, ed., Ecclesiastical Proceedings, in the Case of Mr. Donald McCrimmon . . . (Fayetteville, North Carolina, 1827).

[51] Guthrie, John McMillan, p. 126; John P. Campbell, A Portrait of the Times; or the Church's Duty (Lexington, 1812), pp. 29-30.

Not infrequently, a dispute started in a church court ended in civil court with the two reaching different verdicts, much to the embarrassment of the denomination. Then too, it was difficult to enforce discipline in those areas where denominational standards were not at the same time an element of civil law.[52] Finally, it became a practical impossibility to exercise discipline among those baptized in infancy.[53]

In addition to these there were problems of another sort. The Presbyterians often could not agree on those matters which required disciplinary action. This tended to create hard feelings within the various judicatories and the litigations became drawn out and more involved. Particularly sensitive issues appeared with a haunting frequency only to stir latent hostilities. As a consequence of this, it was often easier for Presbyterians to support separate organizations each with a single purpose about which there was no disagreement. There is no doubt but this was what John H. Rice had in mind when he called on the General Assembly of 1820 to "follow after the things that made for peace."

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[52] Thomas Ledlie Birch, Seemingly Experimental Religion (Washington, Pennsylvania, 1806); Thomas Campbell, ed., Proceedings of the Session of Springfield, N. J. against Thomas Campbell (n.p., 1821); MGA, I, 513-514; Eaton, History of the Presbytery of Erie, p. 75.

[53] MGA, I, 25-27, 89, 91, 171, 431-432, 468, 474, 480, 509, 519, 543, 567, 559, 578, 582, 585, 589, 618; James Richards, Samuel Miller, John B. Romeyn, Report of the Committee of the General Assembly, Appointed to Draught a Plan for Disciplining Baptized Children (New York, 1812).

It is a commonplace observation that institutions governed by constitutions often change, but that the constitutions rarely do. This gives greater significance to the complete revision of that part of the Constitution governing discipline which was effected by the General Assembly of 1821. This part of the Constitution was under attack almost from the beginning. In 1790, 1791 and 1797 requests for clarification were made to the General Assembly.[54] In 1805 the "Forms of Process" was altered so as to provide methods of appeal and complaint by dissenting minorities.[55] Discontent increased[56] to the point that the General Assembly of 1816 appointed a committee consisting of Romeyn, Miller, and Alexander to revise the "Forms of Process." The work proved to be difficult and the committee, to which Eliphalet Nott had been added, did not report until 1819. The committee, confessing their own dissatisfaction with their report, presented a draft of a new document to be sent to the presbyteries for their advice.[57] This made obvious the wide range of differences on the subject. According to the committee, the great diversity of opinions communicated to them rendered their task "more perplexing and arduous." In 1820 the committee reported that it had been "difficult to satisfy their own minds; but it has been in many cases far more difficult, not to say sometimes wholly impracticable, to combine the opposite views, and to conciliate the diversified or contradictory wishes of Presbyteries and individuals."[58] Nevertheless, the committee submitted a report which was revised and sent to the presbyteries for approval. In 1821, the General Assembly was informed that the "whole of the proposed amendments" had been ratified by the presbyteries.[59]

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[54] MGA, I, 25; Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly (Philadelphia, 1791), pp. 14-16; Ibid. (1797), p. 8.

[55] MGA, I, 305, 333.

[56] Ibid., 509.

[57] Ibid., 647, 702.

As compared to the original "Forms of Process," which was a simple document of 1700 words, the new "Book of Discipline" was a complex legal treatise of over 8,000 words. The change of title is significant, because it was in fact a new work which contained only extracts from the older one. The "amendments" constitute the major body of material. The tendency of the new material is the frank admission of the difficulties involved in the administration of discipline. What was originally conceived of as a simple "process" had become a complex affair. In 1788 it was assumed that the church sessions could administer discipline with ease and unity. The provision for appeal came almost as an afterthought, "And, in case of appeal. . . ." Nearly a third of the new work dealt with "appeals," "references," "complaints," and "dissents and protests."[60]

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[58] _Ibid_., 734.

[59] _Ibid_., II, 1821.

After the adoption of the new "Book of Discipline," the administration of discipline was increasingly mired down in constitutional procedure. As explained in the new document,

> An offence, gross in itself, and known to several, may be so circumscribed, that it plainly cannot be prosecuted to conviction. In such cases, however grievous it may be to the pious, to see an unworthy member in the church, it is proper to wait until God, in his righteous providence, shall give further light; as few things tend more to weaken the authority of discipline, and to multiply offences, than to commence process without sufficient proof.[61]

The General Assembly, following Rice's advice to some extent, often viewed the legal difficulties involved as a way of escaping the necessity of rendering a decision or even considering a case. After 1821 a number of cases were dismissed by the General Assembly "on account of the neglect of due formality in prosecuting them."[62]

The whole problem of discipline had become tedious and by 1826 it was obvious that this was one of the things that made it difficult for the General Assembly to promote programs designed to fulfill the requirements of the doctrine of providence and the vision of the millennium. In 1826 the General Assembly asked for a constitutional amendment which would make the synods the final courts of appeal in cases of discipline. The reasoning of the committee which made the suggestion illustrates clearly that discipline had come to interfere with work that it considered to be more important.

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[60] Constitution (1821), pp. 391-431.

[61] Ibid., p. 394.

[62] MGA, II, 109, 30, 45, 242, 263, 269, 292, 339, 363, 429; for a similar process in the Synod of Pittsburgh see Records, pp. 205-206, 227, 240-241, 272.

> That the time which is now consumed by the Assembly in the consideration of complaints and appeals is such as greatly to interfere with a due attention to other important and more general concerns of the church; and this demand of time for complaints and appeals will, if the existing system remains unaltered, speedily become so great, that the very limited period during which the Assembly can sit will scarcely suffice for attending to this single object.[63]

IV

If the business for which the denominational structure had been created interfered with the work that now seemed to be more important, it was equally difficult to change the nature of that structure so as to make it an efficient instrument for the new task. In this process the Presbyterians went through several cycles of frustration leading to reorganization. In their attempts to make their institution a more efficient servant of the doctrine of providence and the vision of the millennium, however, the Presbyterians had by the 1820's destroyed the cohesiveness and integrity of the structures, which tended to fragment their denominational efforts.

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[63] MGA, II, 189.

The pattern of frustration leading to reorganization can be seen first in missionary activity. The General Assembly made its first efforts to improve the efficiency of its missionary work in 1800 and 1802. In 1800 traveling agents were appointed to solicit funds and in 1802 the Assembly created a Standing Committee of Missions. This committee functioned like the Commission of Synod, having power to solicit and distribute funds, appoint missionaries and carry on all missionary activity while the General Assembly was recessed.[64] The efforts under this system proved to be unsatisfying and in 1816 the General Assembly again reorganized. Between 1802 and 1816 the Standing Committee of Missions was only able to supply the equivalent of four full time missionaries per year.[65] The method continued to be the appointment of licentiates or established pastors to itinerate for several months through an assigned area. John McDowell recalled that he had been assigned to travel for six months along the Atlantic coast from New York to Savannah, Georgia. The general approach to missions during this period he characterized as "feeble." Concerning this particular assignment he confessed, "The mission was not fulfilled."[66]

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[64] _Ibid._, I, 206, 227, 250, 254, 257; Drury, _Presbyterian Panorama_, pp. 13-17.

[65] _Ibid._, p. 27.

[66] McDowell, _Fifty Years a Pastor_, p. 26.

Another interesting event occurred in 1802, however, that had significant repercussions for the organization of Presbyterian missionary labors. The Synod of Pittsburgh at its initial session created a separate society, coextensive with itself, to carry on missionary activity. A committee appointed "to draft a plan for the transaction of the missionary business" made the suggestion, which was adopted, that "The Synod of Pittsburgh, shall be stiled the Western Missionary Society." According to a constitution adopted to govern this body, "The object of the Missionary Society is to diffuse the knowledge of the Gospel among the inhabitants of the new settlements, the Indian Tribes, and if need be, among some of the interior inhabitants, where they are not able to support the gospel."[67]

While this society was coextensive with the synod, on paper at least it was a separate organization complete with its own constitution, officers, and later a separate charter. Although the business of the society was conducted during the sessions of the synod, the society was not a part of the denominational structure. This is somewhat ironic, in that by the 1830's the Synod of Pittsburgh was one of the stronger defenders of the idea that the denomination, rather than voluntary associations, was the legitimate institution to carry on missionary work.[68] While the members of this synod would not have viewed this action as going outside their denomination, it was only the fact that the society was coextensive with the synod that differentiated this society from some of the interdenominational societies it later condemned. As a society the synod was the final authority. It could cooperate with non-Presbyterian institutions without the consent of the General Assembly. In 1808, for example, the Massachusetts Missionary Society communicated their "willingness to co-operate with the Western Missionary Society" in a mission at Sandusky, to which "the Synod agreed."[69] This disassociation from the denominational framework is further illustrated in 1824 when the Western Missionary Society became "auxiliary to the United and Foreign Missionary Society, so far as the operations of the former relate . . . to the establishment and support of missions among the Indians."[70]

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[67] Synod of Pittsburgh, Records, pp. 10-11.

[68] *Ibid*., pp. 43, 54, 57, 62, 98, 284-289, 309-311, 328-330.

By forming a society coextensive with itself, the Synod of Pittsburgh was not intending to support wholesale surrender of the denominational structure. At the first meeting of the Presbytery of Portage in 1818, that presbytery formed itself into the "Portage Missionary Society" with the intention of becoming "auxilery (sic) to some Missionary

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[69] Ibid., p. 54. The technical error of the clerk, replacing "synod" for "society," illustrates the practical unity of the two bodies.

[70] Ibid., p. 228.

Society, recognized by the General Assembly." The Synod of Pittsburgh viewed this as a threat to organizational integrity in a way that it did not recognize its own actions. The synod's response to this event illustrates some of the confusion which the formation of coextensive societies had introduced. The synod, "Resolved, That the aforesaid Presbytery is to consider itself collectively as a Presbytery, and individually, as members of the Synod, as a Missionary Society, under its direction, and to render annually an account, to the Synod, of its conduct and proceedings."[71]

By thus attempting to retain a proper order for every endeavor, the Synod of Pittsburgh was in many respects poles apart from the Synod of New York and New Jersey, which did not conduct missionary efforts at all. In New York, interdenominational voluntary societies meeting at separate times carried on this work with the support of individual Presbyterian ministers and the blessing of the synod. A typical comment by the synod was that of 1818.

> The synod have also heard, with pleasure, of numerous benevolent societies . . . within their bounds. . . . These societies, with different minor objects in view, have all one great end, the extension of the kingdom of Christ, and the salvation of the souls of men. The exertions which are making in this way, are among the most encouraging signs of the times, that the Lord is about to appear extensively to build up Zion; and that the time is drawing nigh, when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.[72]

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[71] Ibid., 148, 152.

[72] Synod of New York and New Jersey, Extracts from the Minutes (Elizabethtown, New Jersey, 1818), p. 99.

However different these two synods were, both reflected the opinion that the denominational judicatory as such was not the proper institution to conduct missionary activity.

In 1816 the General Assembly moved in this same direction, when it replaced the Standing Committee with a Board of Missions based on the society principle. By this time the requirements of the doctrine of providence and the vision of the millennium had indeed become pressing, and the inadequacy of the denomination's efforts were obvious. An address from the newly created board, probably written by Jacob Janeway, affirmed, "We are longing and praying for the coming of the day of glory; and perhaps many of us hope to see it." But, the address lamented that at the present rate of exertion it could require a thousand years to furnish enough Bibles and missionaries to fill the earth with "the knowledge of the Lord." Providence also demanded greater activity and the address reminded Presbyterians that "the voice of your country, whose welfare cannot be secure without the prevalence of religion and virtue" called for more missionaries.[73]

According to this report, two causes had "circumscribed the operations of the General Assembly in their benevolent work." These were listed as "the want of adequate funds, and the want of suitable missionaries." The newly created seminary at Princeton was to supply the men and the Board of

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[73] [Jacob J. Janeway], Address of the Board of Missions (Philadelphia, 1816), pp. 4-6, 12.

Missions the money.[74] While the primary purpose of the new organization was to raise funds, neither of the plans suggested in 1800 was then institutionalized. Instead the General Assembly called for the creation of a whole new chain of organizations fashioned after the voluntary societies but auxiliary to the Board of Missions. Under these circumstances it was believed that the board "would . . . be able to carry on the missionary business with all the vigour and unity of design that would be found in a society originated for that purpose."[75]

What the General Assembly did in 1816 was to promote the creation of an organizational system, with membership based on monetary contributions, independent of the framework established in 1788 except that the Board of Missions was elected by the General Assembly and reported to it annually. A presbytery could, and it was hoped that all would, form auxiliary societies, but a presbytery as such was not automatically included in the new organization. In addition, new societies not coextensive with any existing denominational structure could become auxiliary to the Board of Missions. A report from the board in 1819 revealed that only eight of the fifty-three presbyteries had formed auxiliary societies.

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[74] _Ibid_., pp. 21-23.

[75] MGA, I, 633. Cf. Janeway, _Address of the Board of Missions_, p. 7.

At the same time, however, there were eight auxiliary societies not coextensive with any presbytery, session or synod.[76]

This change in the method of conducting missions produced confusion. The intention, apparently, was to augment rather than replace the mission funds collected through the ordinary judicatories. This was not universally recognized and the General Assembly of 1819 informed the presbyteries "that they (were) not to consider the formation of auxiliary societies as exempting them from the duty of taking up collections for the Assembly's missionary fund."[77]

Other than this kind of general confusion, two specific tendencies which flowed from this reorganization were to sunder the unity of the denominational missionary labors and detract from the integrity of the denominational structure as a missionary organization. In the first place, many of the auxiliary societies grew to the point that they hired their own missionaries and controlled all their own funds. This tended to weaken the work of the Board as well as remove the societies from any kind of denominational oversight, since the auxiliary societies did not fall into the denominational structures.[78] The other and perhaps more significant tendency was for presbyteries, once formed into missionary societies, to become auxiliary to some missionary society other than the Board of Missions.[79] In an attempt to make the denominational organization more efficient in missionary activity, the Presbyterians had in fact destroyed the integrity and cohesiveness of its existing structures as far as missionary endeavor was concerned.

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[76] Board of Missions to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, _Extracts from the Report_ (Philadelphia, 1819), p. 26.

[77] MGA, I, 706.

A similar process of frustration leading to reorganization and the creation of hybrid institutions can be seen in the attempts to increase the number of educated ministers. The importance of the ministry for instruction in the "knowledge of the Lord" has already been noted. While the ministry occupied such an important role in the program for the nation, the Presbyterians were faced with a continuing shortage of candidates. The following table, compiled from partial reports of the General Assembly, shows the large gap between the number of available ministers and the number of churches.

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[78] Missionary Society of Philadelphia, auxiliary to the Board of Missions, First Annual Report (Philadelphia, 1819), p. 3; South Carolina Domestic Missionary Society, Second Report (Charleston, 1826), p. 5; Robert Bell Woodworth, A History of the Presbytery of Winchester (Staunton, Virginia: McClure Printing Co., 1947), p. 113.

[79] Gibson, Presbytery of Huntingdon, p. 89; Levi Parsons, History of Rochester Presbytery (Rochester, New York, 1889), pp. 21-23, 30; R. Braden Moore, History of Huron Presbytery (Philadelphia, 1892), pp. 30-31.

YEAR	MINISTERS	LICENTIATES	CHURCHES[80]
1807	330	35	598
1808	317	37	576
1809	392	38	652
1810	434	51	772
1811	460	52	820
1812	469	51	789
1814	511	57	916
1815	520	59	859
1816	511	60	881
1817	536	84	939
1818	625	82	1016
1819	687	102	1194
1820	741	108	1299

For most Presbyterians a minister without a "liberal education" was worse than no minister and the need for more ministers meant that provision had to be made for their education. Since both the doctrine of providence and the vision of the millennium demanded an educated ministry, the Presbyterian insistence on this point was not a nostalgic holdover from the European background but a central aspect of the program for the new nation. The pressure for more ministers occasionally created some support for relaxing the educational standards, but such suggestions were always refused by a great majority in the judicatories.[81] The idea of an "order of catechists" was a compromise solution but this too failed to gain the approval of any significant group.

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[80] MGA, I, 394, 410, 433, 460, 488, 516, 575, 603, 635, 667, 696, 719, 743. More complete figures would reveal an even greater gap, as the presbyteries not reporting were more likely to be those more removed from population centers where there was a smaller ratio of ministers to churches.

[81] Trinterud, Forming of an American Tradition, p. 266.

Even the report which originally entertained this idea carried the injunction that "it is considered expedient by the Assembly that no catechists should be sent out, till a farther order on the subject be issued by the General Assembly."[82] No order came and in 1804 the General Assembly again discouraged the idea.[83] Given this determination the only recourse was to provide for the education of ministers.

As in the case of missions, however, the denomination moved slowly. Nothing seems to have come from the suggestions made in 1800. By 1805 the situation appeared to be critical. The Presbytery of New York in that year took decisive action to provide funds for the education of ministers and expressed their hope that this would "speedily produce a 'general movement' of the Presbyterian Church in the United States."[84] That same year Ashbel Green asked the General Assembly to institute a program through the presbyteries whereby they would "look out among themselves, pious youth of promising talents, and endeavour to educate and bring them forward into the ministry."[85]

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[82] MGA, I, 197.

[83] *Ibid.*, 299-301. The issue came up through a request from David Rice of Kentucky. The Assembly's answer contains the argument against both uneducated ministers and catechists.

[84] Presbytery of New York, *An Address to the Churches under their Care, on the Subject of Education Poor and Pious Youth for the Gospel Ministry* (New York, 1805), p. 8.

[85] MGA, I, 344.

The Assembly's response to Green's proposal illustrates the sluggishness of the denominational machinery. While the General Assembly felt Green's proposal to embrace "objects of high importance," they did not "find themselves in a situation to take the necessary measures respecting them." The subject was recommended for consideration the following year.[86] In 1806 the Assembly was still hesitant to act. Feeling that "immediately to enter into the execution of the plan proposed, might bear hard on some (presbyteries), if not be entirely incapable of execution," the General Assembly simply recommended to the presbyteries "to use their utmost endeavours to increase, by all suitable means in their power, the number of promising candidates for the holy ministry," and to report their actions annually to the Assembly.[87] The business of education for ministers was carried on in this way for a number of years, and this hesitancy or inability to act caused a number of Presbyterians to look beyond the denomination to voluntary societies to perform this task.[88]

In 1809 additional steps were taken to increase the supply of ministers. In that year a proposal was put forth for the establishment of one or more theological seminaries.

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[86] *Ibid.*, 344.

[87] *Ibid.*, 366-367.

[88] *Ibid.*, 379, 404, 419, 451, 465.

The presbyteries were asked to decide whether there should be a seminary in each synod or one or two larger ones centrally located. There was no agreement on the issue and the General Assembly rather arbitrarily decided in favor of one school.[89] This led to the establishment of the Princeton Theological Seminary in 1812.

The founding of the seminary created the need for additional funds. Without even the united support of the denomination, the seminary languished for want of support.[90] In an effort to secure additional funds the General Assembly of 1814 followed a course similar to that of 1816 in the case of missions. The initial attempt to raise funds had been the appointment of soliciting agents and the taking of subscriptions in the congregations.[91] In 1814, however, the Assembly adopted the society principle in addition to these other methods. Previous to 1814 several "associations of pious and benevolent women" had been formed to aid students at the seminary. The Assembly of 1814 saw in this a possible source of great financial support and "earnestly recommended to the congregations in connexion with this Assembly, to countenance and promote the formation of societies in aid of the Theological Seminary."[92]

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[89] Ten presbyteries voted for a single school, one for two, ten for a seminary in each synod, and six favored no action. Ibid., 417, 430, 431, 439, 453, 457.

[90] John McDowell, Sketch of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Elizabethtown, New Jersey, 1817), pp. 11-17; Phillip Lindsly, A Plea for the Theological Seminary at Princeton, N. J. (3rd ed.; Trenton, New Jersey, 1821), pp. 6, 23.

[91] MGA, I, 480.

A committee appointed to draw up a plan for the formation of these societies presented the following report, which demonstrates both the connection of the seminary with the doctrine of providence and the new approach to fund raising.

> It is conceived that no man who loves his country, or who loves our Lord Jesus Christ, and the souls of men in sincerity, can want motives to induce him to lend his aid in accomplishing an object so immensely important.
>
> With sanguine hopes of success, therefore, the General Assembly proffer their claim to the charity of those who feel an interest in the support of our invaluable civil and political institutions. Every free government constituted like ours, depends primarily and essentially for its existence on the moral principles and habits of the people. Where the word of life is not statedly preached, and the ordinances of the gospel administered, the Sabbath will be profaned; and experience proves uniformly and unequivocally, that idleness, intemperance, gambling, and ungovernable licentiousness both in principles and conduct are the inevitable consequences. Will then the lovers of rational liberty, will the friends of our beloved country, refuse to contribute a pittance of the substance which God has entrusted to them, to so noble an object? . . .
>
> The General Assembly earnestly recommend to the several congregations in their connexion the formation of societies for the above purpose. And they solicit especially ministers and elders strenuously to exert themselves to form one such society within their own congregation.[93]

The report included a model constitution for these societies which indicates clearly the tendency toward the establishment of new institutions independent of the denominational structure. Membership was based on contributions alone. "Any person may become a member of this Society by subscribing and paying the sum of one dollar, and may continue a member by paying the same sum annually." Lifetime membership could be attained for twenty dollars.[94]

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[92] Ibid., 562.

[93] Ibid., 571-572.

The seminary survived, soon to be joined by others, but the establishment of centers for ministerial education did not resolve the problem of aid to theological students. There was still a shortage of ministers and in 1819 the General Assembly announced that "the present state of our country most loudly calls for increasing energy and zeal in training young men for the ministry of the gospel." This situation meant that "it has become necessary to originate new and more efficient measures for carrying on this great and important work."[95] The "new and more efficient measure" was a Board of Education which was based on the society principle as the Board of Missions had been. The first object of the board was, "To recognize such Presbyteries and other associations as may form themselves into education societies, as auxiliary to the General Board," and for some time this proved to be its only activity.[96] Once again in an attempt to overcome the apparent organizational deficiencies the Presbyterians had gone outside the existing structures.

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[94] Ibid., 572.

[95] Ibid., 712.

[96] Ibid., 715.

In the early years of its existence the Board of Education was completely overshadowed by its two largest auxiliaries, the Presbyterian Education Society, located in New York, and the Philadelphia Education Society. These two societies illustrate the shape of denominational organization in the early 1820's. The New York branch, established in 1819, was practically autonomous. Its constitution declared it auxiliary to the Board of Education but reserved to the auxiliary society "the full and unrestricted right of taking up any young men who may give satisfactory evidence of piety and talents."[97] In practice this society functioned exactly like a voluntary society with no denominational connection. By 1824 this society had formed nineteen executive committees and seven societies auxiliary to itself, the most remote being in West Tennessee, and another in Philadelphia.[98]

The Philadelphia society, on the other hand, worked in closer harmony with the General Assembly's Board, with many of the officers being common to both. It had been hoped that one large society embodying all the Presbyterian efforts could be formed, but when Samuel Miller and Archibald

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[97] Presbyterian Education Society, Report of the Board of Directors (Newark, 1820), p. 17.

[98] Ibid., pp. 3-4; Ezra Stiles Ely and Jacob J. Janeway, Address of a Committee of the Board of Education (Philadelphia, 1824), p. 10.

Alexander could not agree with the plan of operation put forth by the majority at the organizational meeting of the society in New York, they withdrew and helped form another at Philadelphia later that year. The result was that two societies with somewhat different purposes were set in motion, both presumably auxiliary to the Board of Missions. While there were several differences between these groups, the most significant was the amount of control to be exercised by the Board.[99]

The state of the Board during this period has been adequately stated in one of the official histories of that organization.

> It is not surprising that a Board thus restricted in its objects and without means even to pay its Secretary or to employ agents--an adjunct, as it were, to other organizations--should, after a few years trial, prove insufficient for its cause. The work was done mainly through the auxiliaries scattered throughout the country, with no vital nexus to bind them to a common centre. Its meagre income consisted only of the surplus sent to it by the auxiliaries beyond what was needed by them to meet their own obligations. In 1823, four years after its organization, the whole fund reported to have been at its disposal amounted to only $69.98.[100]

In 1824 the Philadelphia society disbanded and "recommended to their former members, to continue their subscriptions to the Board of Education; and to their auxiliaries, to become auxiliary to the Board, which will now transact the business which before devolved on the Society."[101] The situation after this maneuver was that part of the denominational activity would be directed through the Board, but even more by its larger auxiliary in New York.

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[99] See Asa Hillyer, James Richards, Matthew LaRue Perrine, and Gardiner Spring, A Circular on the Subject of the Education Society of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Newark, 1819); Samuel Miller and Archibald Alexander, Circular Letter to Dr. Richards (Princeton, New Jersey, 1819).

[100] D. W. Poor, An Historical Sketch of the Board of Education (Philadelphia, 1889), p. 5.

While these two societies illustrate again the organizational confusion resulting from the attempts to make a basically inward looking institution function for different ends, they also represent separate trends which were to become marked between 1826 and 1837. The New York group represented those who were becoming convinced that the denominational judicatories ought to do nothing other than manage the internal concerns of the denomination and that voluntary societies, interdenominational in character, should attend to missions, education of ministers and other functions that affected the nation as a whole. The Philadelphia society represented the desire to recover the organizational integrity of the denomination as an institution which would manage all these concerns as well as its own internal government. It was out of this debate which flourished after 1830 that the modern conception of the American religious denomination emerged. While this debate could not have originated without the period of experimentation, the fact remains that during the period from 1816 to 1826 when the great national voluntary societies were being established, the Presbyterian denominational organization did not seem to offer a viable alternative.

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[101] Ely and Janeway, Address of a Committee, 1824, pp. 6-7.

The loss of organizational integrity may be seen in the action of the Rochester Presbytery which was formed in 1819. At its initial meeting committees were appointed to draft constitutions for a "Voluntary Missionary Society" and for a tract society. The following year an Education Society, an Auxiliary Foreign Missionary Society, and a Sabbath School Union were created. With the exception of a Bible society, this action reflected all the concerns voiced by the General Assembly in 1800, yet not one of these concerns was to be acted upon by the presbytery as such. In two areas only was it possible to be related to the denominational structure, but in both cases the connection was optional. In the case of the Sabbath School Union, the presbyterial society expanded to become the Rochester Union in 1822 and in 1824 that union expanded into a society embracing the entire county. The distinction between Presbyterian denominational efforts and those of the voluntary societies had become nearly impossible to make. The only functions left to the presbytery as such were those relating to internal government as defined in the Constitution.[102]

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[102] Parsons, Rochester Presbytery, pp. 30-33.

V

While the denominational structures resisted the incorporation of missionary work and the education of ministers, there were other goals implicit in the doctrine of providence and the vision of the millennium the fulfillment of which were not even attempted through the denomination. Although the trustees' report of 1800 was not an exhaustive list of Presbyterian concerns for the nation, even the majority of items constituting that list were never undertaken by the denomination. The noteworthy items omitted from denominational concern were the "order of catechists" for the instruction of the poor and others destitute of the gospel and the distribution of Bibles and "books and short essays on the great principles of religion and morality." These activities, while thought necessary to promote an operative "association between Religion and Patriotism" had almost from the beginning been assigned to voluntary societies specifically designed for those purposes. While the voluntary societies so organized could perform those functions more expediently than the denomination, there were other attractive features of those institutions which led Presbyterians to help initiate and support them in preference to working through the denomination. The voluntary societies presented an opportunity to pursue both religious "unity" and the "association between Religion and Patriotism" in a way that was simply impossible for the denomination, which was by definition "sectarian" in both church and nation. The voluntary societies thus became institutions of church unity which were to perform those "national" activities which, under an establishment, would have been secured through the offices of civil government. Thus, if the denominational structures were with difficulty changed to include such functions, it was probably because of the prior development of a more appropriate alternative than it was the result of Presbyterian inertia.

CHAPTER V

VOLUNTARY SOCIETIES

Beginning in the 1790's voluntary societies of a religious nature were established in America with a frequency which heralds a new era in the history of this type of association which had actually originated in the era of the Reformation. The creation of these societies grew at an accelerated pace in the first quarter of the nineteenth century so that by 1826 the local societies numbered in the 1,000's and seven societies claimed "national" status. Although any initial definition of these societies as institutions would require subsequent qualification, they were usually non-ecclesiastical organizations of individuals sufficiently concerned with some given issue to unite, pay annual dues, and promote the designs of the society with their time and energy. The names of the national societies suggest in broad outline the nature of all the societies. They were, in order of founding, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810), the American Bible Society (1816), the American Education Society (1816), the American Colonization Society (1816), the American Sunday-School Union (1824), the American Home Missionary Society (1826), and the American Temperance Society (1826).

In recent years two major attempts have been made to explain and characterize this network of voluntary societies. Charles I. Foster understands the societies to be the "machinery" of the "Evangelical united front," which was developed in England, transferred to America and "naturalized." By "Evangelical united front" Foster means "a clearly defined religious party exhibiting at times the potential of becoming a political party as well" which was characterized by emotional revivalism, informal worship and a "commitment to proselyte." The "Evangelical united front" rose in Great Britain as the reaction of conservative Christianity against contemporary forces of change, the nature of which was believed to be expressed vividly in the French Revolution. The conservative British Christians perfected the machinery of voluntary societies, which already had been used effectively in England, to combat these forces and preserve the status quo. "The Evangelicals wanted no changes in the social machinery; they would grease the gears."[1]

While admitting some differences between England and America, Foster's basic contention was that "In many ways the United States simply reflected the total picture of the Western world." The "problems" of American conservative Christians were the same as those of the British, only the

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[1] Charles I. Foster, _An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837_ (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), pp. 3-27, 99.

"environment" differed. There was a "time lag" between the onset of these problems, with the British facing them first. "Americans needed only to follow British experiments closely, absorb the prevailing ideas, and copy British institutions with such adjustments as American conditions and prejudices might suggest." This adoption of British Evangelical machinery for American purposes Foster believes to have been effected only by the early 1830's, after the whole system had gone through a period of "naturalization." "But, curiously, the more distinctly American the movement became and the more engrossed with its peculiar task, the more closely did it approach the united front in Great Britain at the fundamental level of final purpose." The final purpose which Foster articulated most consistently was the preservation of the social status quo by a few religious conservatives through the instrumentality of Christianity.[2]

From another point of view Clifford S. Griffin entertained similar notions about the nature of the complex of voluntary societies in nineteenth century America. Griffin understood the societies to be instruments of social control promoted by a relatively small number of wealthy, conservative American businessmen, designated as "trustees," who were "heirs of the stewardship tradition of the Calvinistic past." Like Foster, Griffin recognized the early nineteenth century as a period of rapid social, political and economic change.

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[2] Ibid., pp. 6-10, 28, 154-155, 178, 185.

The "trustees," of whom the clergy represented only a minority, "had personal reasons for wishing to control society." "The trustees believed that they would suffer if men playing lesser roles on the great American stage did not respect their economic and social obligations, and if American voters did not choose proper men as rulers." Through the societies the "trustees" used "religion and morality, as . . . a means of establishing secular order." Within this context, Griffin wavers between the notion that the "trustees" sought to make the American people "conform to a particular Protestant interpretation of the gospel" and that they merely "condemned as vicious and evil every practice they did not indulge, and . . . damned as ungodly men with different ideas."[3]

Foster and Griffin have made a contribution to an understanding of the voluntary societies in nineteenth century America by pointing to their underlying unity and their significance as social forces. While such a brief treatment fails to do justice to the complex work of these historians, especially Foster's, the study of Presbyterianism in this period raises fundamental questions about their interpretation of the phenomenon. As a result of his emphasis on "social control" Griffin focused almost exclusively on sources for the nationl societies and lay leadership, and he found "trusteeship" to be the integrating factor for the movement from 1815 to 1860. This approach fails to take into account the broader American religious life which was responsible for initiating and sustaining the societies. In addition it fails to detect the important change in the fundamental character of the societies during the 1830's.

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[3] Clifford S. Griffin, Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960), pp. ix-xv, 9.

Many of the weaknesses of Griffin's interpretation are corrected in the more complex and suggestive treatment by Foster. Foster demonstrates greater understanding of the development of religion in America by pointing to some activity prior to the establishment of the national societies and delineating the "collapse" of the united movement in the 1830's. However, his fascination with the society "machinery" and its roots in British culture colors the whole picture by placing an undue emphasis on a relatively short span of time. By focusing on the late 1820's and early 1830's, where there is the greatest parallel between English and American "machinery," Foster also fails adequately to take into account the nature of the American religious life which made the "machinery" seem necessary. By concentrating on this period, Foster also relied heavily on source material from the national societies for his major conclusions.

While no definitive statements about the societies _per se_ can come from the study of Presbyterianism between

1783 and 1826, this perspective offers some correctives to the understanding acquired by Foster and Griffin. The most obvious drawback of this perspective is that it fails to take into account the significant contribution of New England to the total society movement. On the other hand, there is some value in focusing on the Middle and Southern states which are more often treated simply as an extension of New England religious life. Several other benefits of this perspective, however, are very significant. Looking at the societies from the viewpoint of the life of one of the most active participant denominations heightens perception of the interrelationship of the societies and the religious life of the nation. It is clear that the societies were an available arena for certain religious endeavors, whether admirable or not is not the question, which could not be pursued adequately through the denomination. Only from this perspective, for example, can the simplistic notion of "social control" take on an adequate contextual framework and become a means of achieving conceptual clarity about the societies, rather than simply occasional insights into the phenomena.

From the point of view of a study of early nineteenth century Presbyterianism, the societies represented an attempt by Presbyterians and like-minded Christians of other denominations to promote the "association between Religion and Patriotism" which had been deinstitutionalized both by the fragmentation of Protestantism and by the retreat of civil government from jurisdiction in matters of religion.

Since it was believed that society could not be held together except by the bonds of religion, that America's civil and religious liberty could not be perpetuated outside of Protestant Christianity, these Americans did not believe that the nation could afford national religious unconcern. The societies offered a hopeful alternative to civil government in light of a theory of the denomination which had relied on civil government to provide religious cohesion to the society. For the Presbyterians, it was the societies rather than the denomination which seemed best suited to promote the "association between Religion and Patriotism," and it was the societies which seemed to foreshadow the unified millennial Church which would reign in theocratic splendor.

Through the societies Presbyterians could act in a way that was not possible in the denomination. In the societies Presbyterians could associate with Christians of other denominations in "patriotic" activities which might otherwise appear to be selfishly motivated or engaged in for "sectarian" advancement. In addition, they could work with "patriots" who formerly would have supported religious affairs through the civil government but who would tend to shy away from denominational activities for political or other reasons. The societies not only provided a method for this kind of association but also performed tasks either considered too large or inappropriate for the denomination. The societies could promote those activities necessary to the "association between Religion and Patriotism" which were believed to be of national concern but which found no appropriate place in the denomination as it was then conceived. Initially it was hoped that the societies could serve as intermediate institutions between the denominations and civil government which would not suffer the stigma of "disestablishment." When this failed to materialize, the societies turned almost solely to the task of shaping public opinion by "the knowledge of the Lord." The societies could instruct those groups in America which were beyond the influence of organized religion but whose presence seemed to endanger the national character and threaten the nation with providential ruin.

II

While after 1826 participation in the societies became a matter of dispute among Presbyterians, the early societies had elicited their united support. One indication of this is the numerous, constant and unqualified statements of praise in the minutes of the General Assembly. The Assembly first took cognizance of voluntary societies in 1798 in response to a letter from the General Association of Connecticut, which had formed itself into a missionary society. The Assembly answered that while it had had "no convenient opportunity" to engage in this work, it was the "fixed resolution to undertake the same whenever the means shall be in our power." The Assembly noted "with great pleasure," however, that "institutions" for missionary purposes had been formed in New York and Albany and that one was planned in Philadelphia.[4] This same year the Assembly gave its blessings to a society formed in Philadelphia "to aid the civil authority in the suppression of vice and immorality."[5]

Several years passed before the General Assembly again took notice of the voluntary societies. During that time a number of societies had been formed and the Assembly demonstrated the unity of purpose in these societies by giving a blanket approval rather than pointing to specific associations. In 1804 the summary of the state of religion noted briefly that, "The Assembly have likewise heard with uncommon satisfaction, of the increasing number of societies for the purposes of prayer, and for the promotion of piety and good morals."[6] On the same occasion in 1808 the Assembly declared that "Among the visible fruits of an increased attention to the gospel, we recognize the establishment of benevolent institutions, as peculiarly characteristic of the religion of Jesus."[7] In the following year, after listing the work of various societies, the Assembly made this significant statement:

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[4] MGA, I, 146-147.

[5] _Ibid_., 157.

[6] _Ibid_., 309.

[7] _Ibid_., 402.

> These institutions, by calling into exercise the latent gifts and graces of the people of God, in an essential part of his worship, as well as in promoting zeal and brotherly love, have served as nurseries of the Church, and are producing, almost incredible effects upon the moral and religious state of the community.[8]

This recognition of the value of the societies to influence the community beyond the organized life of the denominations was an important consideration in the pattern reflected for the next several years in the Assembly's commenting "with peculiar pleasure" on the activity of the societies.[9]

Prior to 1812 the General Assembly confined its activities largely to this policy of recommendation. Presbyterian ministers often formed the core of the local societies and in 1812 the Assembly recognized the possibility of cooperating organically with societies. In 1812 the Assembly "*Resolved*, That the Committee of Missions be authorized to expend in support of a mission to the Cherokees, annually, $500; and that they be authorized to revive that mission, in conjunction with the New Jersey Missionary Society."[10] Thus began, on a denominational level, a pattern of cooperation between ecclesiastical and extra-ecclesiastical institutions that was to continue for a number of years.[11]

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[8] *Ibid*., 420.

[9] *Ibid*., 443, 483, 498, 529, 555.

[10] *Ibid*., 502.

[11] *Ibid*., 544, 564, 575, 587, 616-617.

The usefulness of the societies led the General Assembly not only to recommend societies already established but also to recommend that new ones be created. As early as 1809 the Assembly's Committee of Overtures recommended the establishment of a "general religious tract society." The national society approach had not as yet received general acceptance and the Assembly called for the formation of more local tract societies.[12] Again in 1814 some of the commissioners to the General Assembly wished to use the influence of that body in the formation of a "general Bible Society." While there was by that time considerable support for such a society, most of the commissioners desired to relieve the prospective society of the charge of "sectarianism" and the subject was "indefinitely postponed." It was thought that the better approach to the formation of a national society would be for some state society to bring the measure forward. Elias Boudinot, president of the New Jersey Bible Society, was present at the meeting and having been convinced of the utility of a national society used his influence toward that end.[13]

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[12] _Ibid._, 422-423, 429-430. The Bible Society of Philadelphia, established at this same period, seriously considered the merits and disadvantages of national societies and rejected that approach for a series of state societies. Bible Society of Philadelphia, _Address to the Friends of Revealed Truth in the State of Pennsylvania_ (Philadelphia, 1810), pp. 6-8.

[13] MGA, I, 573; Spring, _Memoir of Mills_, pp. 96-97. The General Assembly had been for some time concerned with the distribution of Bibles, various religious books and tracts. The success achieved through the use of the denominational resources were even more meagre than that in missions and education. MGA, I, 12-13, 97, 123, 196, 254, 268-269, 297, 339, 346, 368, 375, 478.

By 1815 the General Assembly was convinced that the societies could be powerful agents in the promotion of the "association between Religion and Patriotism." In reviewing the state of religion in America, the Assembly spoke of the "judgments of pestilence and war. . . (which) the alien from the commonwealth of Israel, the man of earth, the unbelieving servant of the corruption which is in the world through lust has regarded . . . with indifference," and wished for "a more general amelioration of manners and habits, that improvement of the dispensations of Almighty God, which he expects, and mankind are obligated to exhibit." In turning to the work of the societies the Assembly reflected,

> The social principle is mighty in its operations. . . . When sanctified by religion, and consecrated to the immediate service of God, what results of high import and holy advantage may not be expected from it? . . . The practice of uniting the talents, influence, and resources of individuals, by these hallowed bonds, and for these religious, moral, and charitable purposes, is not novel. . . . But it seems, that at no former period has it been pursued with such vigour, extension, and success, as recently.[14]

III

One of the most attractive things about the societies for Presbyterians was that they served as agencies of Christian unity which enforced the millennial vision and signified its immanence. The connection between the millennium and missionary societies in America was recognized long ago by Oliver Wendell Elsbree.[15] More recently Lefferts A. Loetscher has confirmed the importance of the millennium to Christian unity in early nineteenth century America.[16] The millennium became a favorite subject for sermons preached before the various societies. Romeyn, in addressing the New York Missionary Society in 1812, presented his fullest exposition of the millennium and affirmed that "No subject . . . can be more suitable to our present meeting." In considering the "future state of the Church," Romeyn dwelt at length on unity and declared "missionary Institutions" to be "founded upon the prospects of the Church according to Prophecy."[17]

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[14] *Ibid.*, 593-594. For similar statements on the societies on a synodical level see, Synod of New York and New Jersey, *Extracts from the Minutes* (1809), pp. 6-7; *ibid.* (1812), p. 54; *ibid.* (1814), p. 71; *ibid.* (1815), p. 77.

While there was a difference in the rhetoric used about the exact relationship of the societies to millennial unity, it was universally affirmed that the relationship did exist. The Northern Missionary Society in upstate New York declared in 1797 that such "extraordinary union" foretold the coming millennium.[18] John Mason, who delivered the first sermon before that body, believed the unity represented by the society to be in conformity to the millennial vision. He rejoiced that "while the spirit of discord rages in the world, the spirit of love descends upon the Church," and declared that "the spell of party is broken."[19] The New York Missionary Society, formed a year earlier, was more cautious. It viewed the societies as a way to transcend denominational differences and work toward unity while maintaining denominational distinctives. In its initial address to the public the society disclaimed any "conspiracy against the outward distinctions that prevail among us," while affirming that "the hearty concurrence of Christians of different denominations . . . will be a token for good, that the Lord is about to build up Zion, and to appear in his glory."[20]

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[15] Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America, p. 145.

[16] "The Problem of Christian Unity in Early Nineteenth-Century America," Church History, XXXII (March, 1963), 3-4.

[17] Romeyn, Sermons, I, 143-147.

[18] Northern Missionary Society in the State of New York, Constitution (Schenectady, 1797), p. 14.

The weight of conviction seems to have been that the societies would lead to unity, although occasionally in moments of exuberance unity could be pronounced as complete. Declamations such as that of Gardiner Spring before the initial meeting of the United Domestic Missionary Society that "every suspicion and animosity" had been buried and that "We are now ONE," were in the minority.[21] The more consistent view was that expressed by the Bible Society of Philadelphia in 1809 when it declared that the unity of Christians would be a "by-product" of the society. The distribution of Bibles would open the way for "the fulfillment of the prediction of the prophet, 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters that cover the sea.'"[22]

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[19] Mason, Writings, I, 151.

[20] New York Missionary Society, The Address and Constitution (New York, 1796), p. 10.

[21] Gardiner Spring, The Subjection of the Kingdoms of this World to the Kingdom of Our Lord and His Christ (London, 1823), p. 20.

Since for Presbyterians the Bible was the supreme source of the "knowledge of the Lord," it was the Bible societies that offered the most promising avenue to unity. This is not to say that the Presbyterians believed that the distribution of the Bible "without note or comment" was sufficient to produce the millennium. The emphasis on a trained ministry as a vital source of instruction also demanded education and missionary societies. While these societies could produce disagreement, however, there was a consensus on the Bible as the source of that truth which would eventually lead all men to see "eye to eye." For this reason Bible societies were the most significant in terms of Christian unity.[23] Matthew LaRue Perrine reflected this opinion before the Presbytery of New York in 1816. He believed that "the rough edges of bigotry and superstition are wearing off, and Christians are coming gradually nearer and nearer together." The most important aspect of the growing unity, which would be complete in the millennium, was that Christians "agree in having confidence in the Scriptures, as being a plain, and sufficiently sure, guide in all matters of faith and practice." Since Perrine believed that "religious truth is one and the same; and all Christians have one and the same source of information," the distribution of Bibles by Bible societies would be the most significant step in bringing about ultimate unity.[24]

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[22] Bible Society of Philadelphia, First Report (1809), pp. 9, 12.

[23] Jabez Chadwick, The Duty and Importance of Promoting the Spread of the Gospel (Homer, New York, 1816), pp. 14-17; James Richards, A Sermon . . . (Newark, 1819), p. 20; John Ford, A Sermon . . . (Newark, 1820), pp. 6-13; George A. Baxter, "Responsibilities of the Ministry and Church," The National Preacher, III (New York, December, 1828), 106.

In his description of the "signs of the times," Blythe recognized all the societies but gave pre-eminence to Bible societies. Significantly, Blythe too was addressing a denominational judicatory. He hailed the "spirit of association," which he saw pervading Christendom, as "the great restorative of love, concord, and peace to Christ's church." A feature of great moment was that in fifty years every man would have a Bible. "It seems as tho' it were designed by God, that Bible societies should accompany those other momentous events we have noticed above--that they should all break upon the world together . . . to light up that glorious day."[25]

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[24] Perrine, Gospel Dispensation, pp. 12-23.

[25] Blythe, Portrait of the Times, pp. 38-43.

If the societies were bringing about the unity of the church, that unity was not purposeless. Consistent with the millennial vision, the societies unified Christians to extend the "Kingdom," or to promote the universal domination of Christianity. The Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, which declared as its first purpose "to cultivate unity and christian charity among those of different names," made explicit the relationship of this unity to universal domination.

> It is to be the fruit of the Redeemer's sufferings, that he shall gather together *in one* all things, visible and invisible, in heaven *and* earth. Every union formed in the spirit, and to promote the design of his Gospel, may be considered as a stage of advancements towards this consummation of his purposes and an acceleration of that hour, when he shall deliver up to the Father the mediatorial kingdom, tranquillized, *united*, and holy, "that God may be all in all."
>
> The comparative *fewness* of christians, calls for all practicable and *profitable* union amongst themselves. *Divide* and *conquer* is the maxim of their great foe: *Unite* and *triumph*, be then the motto of christians.[26]

In the millennial context the societies offered the most fruitful source of unity for a divided Protestantism both in terms of its internal life and in terms of its theocratic vision. In case of the latter, however, the vagueness of the millennial symbol, while remaining the long range goal, gave way to the more specific formulation of the American Corollary as a directive for action in the present. If Christian unity would not be consummated until the millennium, there were still the more immediate concerns with America which demanded unified action. The societies provided Christians with a way to cooperate without surrendering their peculiarities, but also made available institutions that would promote and allow the "association between Religion and Patriotism" in a way that was not possible in the denomination.

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[26] Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report* (Philadelphia, 1818), p. 3.

That the primary focus of the societies was the nation was pointed out by both Foster and Griffin and is verified in the literature of the societies from the establishment of the earliest local societies to the founding of the national societies. To an amazing degree these statements of national purpose reflected the symbol system of Presbyterianism. Lyman Beecher established a society "for the suppression of vice and immorality" on Long Island as early as 1803. Pastor of a Presbyterian church at the time, Beecher pointed to a resolution of the General Assembly of 1798 in support of such action. His own opinion was that such societies were a "probable, and perhaps the only method, to preserve the liberties of our nation," because "in a republic, the virtue of the citizen is the life of the government." While Beecher recognized that his society was only for a single small town, he hoped that the society system would spread.[27]

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[27] Lyman Beecher, The Practicability of Suppressing Vice, by Means of Societies Instituted for that Purpose (New London, Connecticut, 1804), pp. 14-15, 19-21.

When the Bible Society of Philadelphia, which listed Archibald Alexander, Ashbel Green, and Jacob Janeway among its managers, gave its first report in 1809 the national concern was apparent. As a local society, the Philadelphia group hoped that other such societies would be formed. "However, the managers believe, that if no similar societies should be formed in any part of this country, then it will be the duty of the Society, to extend its arms from Maine to Georgia, and from the Atlantic to the Mississippi."[28]

In 1815 Nathaniel S. Prime, pastor of the Presbyterian church in Cambridge, New York, informed the Cambridge Moral Society that he appeared before them "as the advocate of the common cause of God and of my country." Reiterating the Presbyterian position that no country, especially a republic "can long exist" without the influence of virtue and religion, Prime declared that the societies were the solution. "Success in this undertaking will give more stability to our government, and security to its citizens, than all the constitutions and treaties that human wisdom can devise."[29] Jabez Chadwick managed a more dynamic assertion when he informed the Genesee Missionary Society in 1816 that "every nation which does not submit to Christ must be dashed to pieces." The way for America to escape was to have more missionary,

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[28] Bible Society of Philadelphia, First Report, p. 8.

[29] Nathaniel S. Prime, An Address to the Cambridge Branch of the Moral Society of the County of Washington (Albany, 1815), pp. 3-8.

Bible and tract societies and more educated ministers.[30]

The American Bible Society, one of the first of the national societies, expressed similar concerns in its first communication with the public. The society noted that "the political world has undergone changes stupendous, unexpected, and calculated to inspire thoughtful men with the most boding anticipation." The fear was that the population of the United States would revert to a "species of heathenism which shall have all the address and profligacy of civilized society, without any religious control."[31]

As the societies became larger and more numerous the national aspirations continued to dominate. In addressing the United Domestic Missionary Society, John Holt Rice pictured America as a great nation consisting of two hundred million people of a "homogeneous race." The big question in his mind was "Can this degree of liberty be enjoyed, and the order of society be preserved, and the interest of religion be promoted." His decided opinion was that America could only fulfill that destiny if his generation were successful in extending the influence of Christianity throughout the nation. The only hope for accomplishing that task was the united effort of the societies.[32]

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[30] Chadwick, Duty and Importance, pp. 14-16.

[31] American Bible Society, Constitution (New York, 1816), pp. 13-16.

[32] John Holt Rice, Charity at Home (New York, 1824), pp. 16-17, 25.

Perhaps the most concise statement of the national concern was that of the United Domestic Missionary Society as that body was in the process of joining with other missionary societies to form the American Home Missionary Society in 1826. The society explained the uniqueness of the American situation when compared with England and the European nations.

> But here, every citizen has a responsible part in sustaining the dominion of his country. The sovereignty is in the people. The government of the United States is practically a government of opinion; and the representation of the people, both in our National and State legislatures, is becoming every year more and more literal and perfect. The voice of each individual subject, and of each district represented, is every year more distinctly heard, and more implicitly obeyed, in all our legislative bodies. If, therefore, we would guard the administration of our government from abuse, and our political institutions from ruin, we must purify the twelve million sources of political power and public influence which are to be found in the sentiments and manners of the individuals who compose the nation. This we believe can be done in no other way so effectually as by the permanent establishment of Christian ordinances. All history assures us that the strongest guarantee of the intelligence, the political security and social morality of any people, is to be found in the stated and faithful preaching of the doctrines of God.[33]

IV

In pursuing these national concerns a united Protestantism was believed to be a must not only in the simple arithmetic of power but as an acceptable means of approach. While the impression is strong that many Presbyterians viewed the process as one of Protestantism today, Presbyterianism tomorrow, Presbyterianism could not be demanded of the nation in the same way as the simple gospel. Many agreed with John Holt Rice who surveyed the religious situation in 1819 and concluded that Presbyterianism would, "should no unforseen disaster occur, be the prevalent religion in the land." Rice went on to express his satisfaction by declaring, "Religion is the glory and safety of our land. May it triumph over all opposition." In the meantime, however, Rice was willing to cooperate with other denominations in the societies to bring this about.[34] And the societies were such that "Local feelings, party prejudice, sectarian jealousies, are excluded by its (their) very nature."[35] While this assertion was more fiction than fact, as the societies in the Middle and Southern states were made up predominantly of persons in the Reformed tradition with the support of a few individuals of other denominations, the societies were pictured by their supporters as synonymous with non-sectarianism. Even a Presbyterian based society could still "disclaim all sectarian, and party principles and prejudices."[36]

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[33] American Home Missionary Society, Constitution (New York, 1826), p. 47.

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[34] Maxwell, Memoirs of Rice, pp. 165-166.

[35] American Bible Society, Constitution, p. 16.

[36] Society of Inquiry Respecting Missions, of the Theological Seminary Established at Princeton, New Jersey, A Statement of the Origin, Progress, and Present Design (Trenton, New Jersey, 1817), p. 5.

While a society could appear to be national in a way that no denomination could claim, they also offered the possibility of a different kind of unity that likewise would have been impossible in a denomination. Politicians, businessmen and others could participate in the work of the societies and there serve as "nursing fathers," a role for which there was no place in America's civil governments. Such men would participate in the societies who otherwise would have been only loosely associated with organized religion. By uniting in one group religious and secular leaders the societies became pre-eminently the locus of an "association between Religion and Patriotism."

While many persons of this description actively joined in the labor of the societies, more simply allowed the organizations to use their influence to sanction the enterprise in a subtle form of advertising. From an early date it became the custom to elect as vice-presidents of the societies a number of men who were well known in the community and whose support was deemed valuable. There were no duties connected with this office and those elected were sometimes informed only after the election had taken place. By merely accepting the position the person sanctioned the purposes of the society. John Holt Rice, always anxious to portray the best of motives, said of this practice, "When men, who have the confidence of the country on account of their intelligence and patriotism" support the societies, it assures the public "that these associations have no object in view but that which is avowed."[37]

The societies actively sought this kind of support and in at least one instance it proved a source of embarrassment. At the convention for the formation of the American Bible Society, which was composed primarily of men from the Middle and Southern states a large percentage of whom were Presbyterian, twenty-two such vice-presidents were elected and their names printed with the constitution of the newly formed society. Ten of these men, including three governors or former governors, one lieutenant governor, and one attorney general, refused to serve and their names were conspicuously absent in the next public announcement of the society.[38] While the plan did not always work smoothly, the societies could use the names of those "whose station gives influence and fashion to their conduct" as a sanction of the religious enterprise that would not have been available to the denomination.

The American Bible Society pursued this type of support one step further. At the request of the Board of Managers, a public meeting of the citizens of New York was convened at the city hall on May 13, 1816. The meeting was chaired by Smith Thompson, chief justice of the state of New York, with the mayor of New York and two United States supreme court justices participating. After several speeches laudatory of the society, John B. Romeyn, Secretary of Domestic Correspondence for the society, read the society's constitution. At the conclusion of the meeting the group of citizens "Resolved, That this meeting will cheerfully support this great National Institution." While it is apparent that this assembly had no legal power, it was nevertheless an example of the "association between Religion and Patriotism."[39]

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[37] Rice, Charity at Home, p. 3; "Correspondence of the Western Foreign Missionary Society," Introduction by Guy S. Klett, Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXXVI (June, 1958), 96-97, 100.

[38] American Bible Society, Constitution, p. 7; First Annual Report of the Board of Managers (New York, 1817). These were: governors William Jones of Rhode Island, Isaac Shelby of Kentucky, and Thomas Posey of Indiana Territory; lieutenant-governor William Gray of Massachusetts; and Attorney General William Wirt. Congressman William Gaston of North Carolina, a Catholic, also refused to serve.

The drive toward a closer association of religious and political figures was apparent in 1816 when Nathaniel S. Prime published _A Plan for the More Successful Management of Domestic Missions_. Prime was a Presbyterian minister who graduated from the College of New Jersey in 1804 and served churches in various parts of New York. His plan anticipated in several particulars the later development of the societies in America. Prime called for a greater centralization, replacement of itinerant missionaries by resident pastors, curtailment of expensive Indian missions for a greater concentration on the white citizenry of the United States and an increase in efforts to educate the ministry. Within this broad framework, however, Prime wished to enlist greater participation from the nation's lawmakers. He proposed that each state form a central society to meet annually at the "seat of government." According to Prime,

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[39] American Bible Society, _Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New York and Others_ (New York, 1816), p. 3.

> On the proposed plan we may calculate on securing the influence of the members of the Legislature in favor of the institution. The day has arrived when religion generally, and religious institutions in particular, have become popular in this as well as other countries; and the great and honourable are proud of being their patrons. If a State Missionary Society should be formed at the seat of government, and meet there annually during the session of the Legislature, considering the present state of public feeling, we might expect that the members of that honourable body generally, would, from year to year, cheerfully enrol (sic) their names as of the institution; and contribute their exertions as well as their money to promote its success. Now consider for a moment, the immense advantage of such an accession of members to the missionary interest. The Legislature is composed of men of high standing and extensive influence in their respective counties. We may charitably hope, that they would return home each more or less impressed with the importance of the missionary cause; and by their influence, auxiliary societies might, and if it were thought best would be established in every county of the State. And thus numerous streams would be continually flowing into one great reservoir, from which the wilderness and the solitary place shall be refreshed with the water of eternal life.[40]

V

In addition to this informal kind of support from the nation's "patriots," there was some hope that the societies could achieve a more direct form of government aid that had been denied to the denominations. The most fortunate society in this respect was the American Colonization Society, the success of which was thought to be a necessary step toward accomplishing the national goals of the Presbyterians and their associates in the societies. P. J. Staudenraus has portrayed the connection of this society to the religious life of the nation and pointed to its specific function in relation to the other societies in the following language.

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[40] Nathaniel S. Prime, *A Plan for the More Successful Management of Domestic Missions* (Albany, 1816), p. 5.

> The American Colonization Society, like its many sister "benevolent" societies of the nineteenth century, argued that a ruling Providence guided nations to ruin or salvation. . . . With the conspicuous cooperation of Providence, the American nation could root out its social and political deficiencies, atone for past misdeeds, and shape the course of unborn generations.
>
> The social "evil" which most concerned the American Colonization Society was the presence of a second race, a socially inferior and repressed nation. . . . Removal of the alien race would atone for the African slave trade, root out slavery . . . and hasten the coming of the American nation's millennium when "one happy, united, homogeneous race of freedmen" would tread the land.[41]

The American Colonization Society differed from the others in that it was "national" almost from the beginning. The fact that it was supported strongly by many of the nation's most powerful political figures often eclipses its religious, if not totally Presbyterian origin. The prime mover behind the society was Robert Finley, pastor of the Presbyterian congregation at Baskingridge, New Jersey, who was trained at Princeton by Witherspoon, Smith and

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[41] P. J. Staudenraus, The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. vii-viii.

Green. Reflecting his heritage, Finley was convinced that "Should the time ever come when slavery shall not exist in these states, yet if the people of colour remain among us, the effect of their presence will be unfavourable to our industry and morals."[42] Having determined to establish a colonization society, Finley easily secured the support of neighboring Presbyterian ministers. In 1816 he brought up the idea before the Synod of New York and New Jersey, which had but recently established the African Education Society to train Negro preachers and teachers for the blacks of America. At this meeting, even before the colonization society was formed, the Synod agreed to train missionaries and magistrates for the proposed African colony.[43]

With the support and encouragement of his friends in New York and New Jersey, Finley went to the "seat of government," Washington, D. C., to enlist the aid of the nation's political leaders. This he succeeded in doing in a very short period of time. When the constitution for the society was adopted on December 28, 1816, the meeting was held in the hall of the House of Representatives, chaired by no less a figure than Henry Clay and attended by "a score of men of rank and renown." The thirteen vice-presidents "were highly placed politicians or men of national reputation" including Secretary of the Treasury William Crawford, Speaker of the House Henry Clay, and General Andrew Jackson.[44]

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[42] Quoted in Isaac V. Brown, Memoirs of the Rev. Robert Finley, D.D. (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1819), p. 39.

[43] Staudenraus, African Colonization Movement, pp. 15-18; Brown, Memoirs of Finley, pp. 75-79.

Finley had determined from the beginning that such a scheme would require the support of the federal government and within two weeks after its organization, the American Colonization Society petitioned Congress to create an African colony. As recorded in the first report of the society, "The first step of the board of managers was to present a memorial to Congress."[45] Congress did not immediately comply and efforts were made by Finley and Samuel J. Mills to form auxiliary societies. The auxiliary system in this case was "merely supplemental to the larger goal of federal assistance" and the money raised in this fashion was used primarily to gather information and assimilate arguments that would convince Congress of the necessity and feasibility of the plan.[46] In the meantime the society was endorsed by several state legislatures as well as several Presbyterian judicatories. The General Assembly recommended the society "to the patronage and attention of the churches under their care, and to benevolent individuals throughout the union."[47]

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[44] Staudenraus, African Colonization Movement, pp. 27-30; American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, First Annual Report (Washington, 1818), p. 11.

[45] Ibid., p. 3; Brown, Memoirs of Finley, p. 91.

[46] Staudenraus, African Colonization Movement, p. 60.

By 1819 a committee of the society was convinced that all arguments had been settled except "the simple question, whether the undertaking shall be adopted and patronized by the Government, so as to become essentially national in its means and its objects; or whether its ultimate success is to depend upon the responsibility and exertions of individuals."[48] The society finally secured the support of President James Monroe in 1819, and the first American ship sailed for Africa in 1820. But, as Staudenraus concluded, "tacit aid fell short of total acceptance of the principle of government-sponsored colonization." The colonization society remained "a private agency, a mendicant no different from the many benevolent societies of the time."[49] While the society continued through the years to solicit government aid, the whole scheme of colonization became an object of political contention "and in a short time the unsuccessful contest for federal aid grew small in importance compared with the bitter contest for public opinion stirred by an angry Boston editor in gray steel spectacles--William Lloyd Garrison."[50]

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[47] MGA, I, 710. For later support of the society by the General Assembly see MGA, II, 154, 178-180, 365-366, 411. American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States, Third Annual Report (1820), pp. 129-130.

[48] Ibid., Second Annual Report (1819), p. 130.

[49] Staudenraus, African Colonization Movement, pp. 65-66.

[50] Ibid., p. 187.

A second area in which the societies obtained some cooperation and financial support from the federal and state governments was Indian missions. As in the case of free Negroes, it was believed that the presence of "ignorant, uncivilized and savage" Indians on the fringes of American society threatened both the national and social security of the nation.[51] The remedy was to civilize and Christianize the Indians. The early efforts at Indian missions in this period were based on a philosophy coinciding with the Presbyterian concept of "civilization." While it was generally held that Christianity was necessary to the civilization of the Indians, in practice the missionary societies did not distinguish between the two. Even the General Assembly reversed the generally accepted formula when it considered a plan for Indian missions in 1800. The Assembly proposed that the "gospelizing" of the Indians be "connected with a plan for their civilization, the want of which it is believed has been a great cause of the failure of former attempts to spread Christianity among them."[52]

R. Pierce Beaver has delineated the cooperation between the government and the societies in his recent monograph, Church, State, and the American Indians: Two and a Half Centuries of Partnership in Missions between Protestant Churches and Government.[53] According to Beaver, Henry Knox, the first Secretary of War who was responsible for shaping the government's Indian policy, "shared many of the opinions of the directors of the missionary societies, and he envisaged a program of civilization carried out through Christian missions as the key to a successful policy." In a report to President Washington in 1789 Knox outlined his policy.

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[51] John McKnight, Life to the Dead (New York, 1799), p. 60.

[52] MGA, I, 195. For further discussions of this issue see William Linn, The Christian's Zeal for the Church (New York, 1800), p. 14; Mason, Works, I, 144-148; Alexander, A Missionary Sermon . . . (1814), p. 18; Alexander, Objections Obviated, pp. 10-13.

> Missionaries, of excellent moral character, should be appointed to reside in their nations, who should be well supplied with all the implements of husbandry, and the necessary stock for a farm. . . . Such a plan, although it might not fully effect the civilization of the Indians, would most probably be attended with the salutary effect of attaching them to the interest of the United States.[54]

This coincidence of purpose and method led to cooperation. The missionary societies furnished men and the government supplied land and financial assistance, and with that a certain amount of prestige--or coercion. State governments also joined the effort. The missionaries in return often served as semi-official agents for the government. This relationship in action comes to light in the diary of Joseph Bullen, first missionary of the New York Missionary Society. He reported having "a good long talk with Wolfe's friend, head man of this nation." After explaining the gospel, Bullen informed the chief "of the great love the council at New-York have for the Chickasaws, and of the good-will of his great father the President." Later in a large meeting with the tribe, Bullen began by announcing the arrival of presents from the United States government, explained the Christian religion, and concluded by teaching the alphabet.[55]

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[53] (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966).

[54] Quoted in ibid., p. 64.

In 1818 the level of cooperation was intensified through the efforts of President Monroe, and in 1819 the government set up a permanent fund to be made available to missionary societies for use in Indian missions.[56] At an earlier date the General Assembly had received some support from the federal government in its own efforts in Indian missions. While this aid had more recently been denied, the Assembly noted their approval of the new arrangement in the following resolution.

> That the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States are highly gratified in observing the benevolent exertions of the general government to promote the civilization of the Indian tribes within its territories by the support of schools, and by introducing among them the arts of social life. The Assembly feel confident that the general government, by adopting these measures, act in accordance with the wishes of a large proportion of the American people.
>
> The Assembly sincerely pray that the Supreme Being may bless these exertions to reclaim the aborigines of our continent from the darkness and ferocity of

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[55] New York Missionary Magazine and Repository of Religious Intelligence, III (New York, 1802), 206.

[56] Beaver, Church, State, and the American Indians, pp. 67-79.

> their savage state, to the privileges and enjoyments of Christian civilization.[57]

If the societies were able to attain the aid of the government in their attempts to purify American society by removing the blacks and civilizing the Indians, they were not successful in those areas designed for the white citizenry of America. The civil governments were more respectful of the rights of white Americans. This was highlighted, for example, when the Pennsylvania legislature granted a charter to the Western Missionary Society which prohibited the society "from expending their funds in preaching the gospel to any other objects but the Indians." The society had sought incorporation as a missionary institution for both Indians and "destitute" American citizens.[58]

The hopes of those who supported the societies and the reluctance of the government emerged most clearly in the discussion surrounding a petition to Congress by the managers of the American Bible Society requesting free postage and exemption from duty on paper used in the printing of Bibles. The petition, dated December 4, 1817, was pigeon-holed by Congress and in 1819 the managers published the document along with their arguments in support of such legislation.

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[57] MGA, I, 734. For the government's early support of the Assembly's Indian missions and later refusals, see MGA, I, 331, 355-356, 423-424, 464, 565. The Synod of Pittsburgh also received some aid from the federal government. Synod of Pittsburgh, Records, pp. 33-35.

[58] *Ibid*., pp. 54, 57, 62, 71, 83.

While the author remains anonymous, the probability of his being a Presbyterian is substantial. John B. Romeyn, Secretary of Domestic Correspondence and John M. Mason, the Secretary for Foreign Correspondence who became a Presbyterian in 1821, would be the most likely candidates.[59]

The American Bible Society based its case for special government aid on the twofold argument that its operation would be beneficial to the nation and that such aid would be in conformity with intentions of the Constitutional provisions against an establishment of religion. Both of these arguments were perfectly consistent with the Presbyterian position. In support of the first contention, Congress was reminded that the governments of Russia, Prussia, Saxony, Wertemberg, and the Netherlands had felt Bible distribution to be of such national importance as to warrant government support. Noting that Congress had exempted postage on letters of a "Vaccine Institution" in Baltimore, the pamphlet declared, "While it is readily conceded that the public health is an object of sufficient importance to justify the granting of this privilege, can it be denied, that the promotion of religion and morals, and the consequent improvement of society, is no less important in a national view." In fact, the Bible Society had a more valid claim for public support than any other "benevolent agencies" because it was "a *National Institution*, founded for, and directing all its efforts to *national objects*." The society was "not for the accommodation of any prescribed district, or religious persuasion, but for the *public good*" since its efforts "tend to the improvement of society in knowledge and virtue." Since Congress had granted exemption "in cases of *inferior* national importance," it could not fail to grant the society's request.[60]

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[59] It should be remembered that the society generally was dominated by Presbyterians in this period. One of the most pressing criticisms of the society was that it would become solely Presbyterian in sentiment. The criticism was based on the constituency of the society and its meeting at the same time of the Presbyterian General Assembly. _An Appeal to the Christians of America, In Behalf of the American Bible Society_ (New York, 1816), p. 37.

In arguing that such aid would be consistent with the Constitution, the managers claimed that the relevant articles were not intended to work "against the *principles of Christianity*." According to the society, "The *real* evils . . . intended to be averted, were the dominant influence of any one religious sect, the union of *ecclesiastical* with *civil* power, the tyranny of *one* favoured and usurping religious denomination, and the consequent degradation and persecution of every other *dissenting* persuasion." Such laws could not apply to Bible societies which were "composed of persons of *various* religious sentiments" and which aimed at "demolishing the barriers that separate christians from each other." Congress was again reminded, from the society's address to the American public, "that local feeling, party prejudices, and sectarian jealousies" were excluded "by the very nature of the Society." In fact, the society claimed, by absorbing funds which were intended for religious purposes through taxes and postal fees, the government was violating the spirit of the constitution "by '_prohibiting_,' to a certain extent, '_the free exercise of religion_.'"[61]

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[60] American Bible Society, *Memorial of the Board of Managers* (New York, 1819), pp. 6-8.

Had the American Bible Society been successful the way would have been opened for government aid to the societies generally. While the petition did not press this point, as it may have tended to make their own appeal less acceptable, it did note that circulation of "printed Reports of Bible Societies, and other religious publications" could not be called "an establishment of religion."[62] The millennium not yet arrived, however, when all would see "eye to eye" and the magistrates would be "nursing fathers," the government resisted these attempts and the societies were forced to rely on the support of individual public figures to promote the "association between Religion and Patriotism."

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[61] _Ibid._, pp. 10-11.

[62] _Ibid._, p. 10.

VI

Another attempt to establish a more direct cooperation of churchmen and magistrates through the society method also failed to become an established pattern in American life. This was the creation of "moral societies" which generally listed as their purpose "to aid the magistrates in the suppression of vice and immorality." The extent of these societies is difficult to determine. Unlike Bible, missionary and other societies, the reports of the moral societies were seldom published and since this particular aspect of the society movement produced no permanent or national society, many of the records have disappeared.[63] There were probably more than has generally been recognized. Foster lists only three, all of which were located in New England. In addition to these there were several others in the Middle and Southern states founded between 1798 and 1817 in which Presbyterian participation was conspicuous.[64]

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[63] Foster, Errand of Mercy, p. 29.

[64] Ibid., pp. 273-275. Othere were as follows: Philadelphia Society to Aid the Magistrates in the Suppression of Vice and Immorality, 1798, sanctioned by the General Assembly; Moral Society of Easthampton, Long Island, 1803, founded by Lyman Beecher; a society in Delaware "established for the suppression of vice and immorality" in which John Latta was active; New Jersey Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality, 1817; Cambridge Moral Society, 1815, an "auxiliary" society in which Nathaniel Prime was a leader. See MGA, I, 157; Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit, III, 205-206; Beecher, Practicability of Suppressing Vice, pp. 25-26; Prime, An Address . . . (1815), p. 9; New Jersey Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality, and for the Encouragement of Virtue and Good Morals, Constitution (New Brunswick, 1818), pp. 3-4.

These societies were in accord with the Presbyterian tactic of attempting to have enforced those existing laws which they approved, Sabbath laws being a prime example. The General Assembly of 1815 specifically recommended the formation of this kind of society. Such recommendation was adequate to produce greater activity at the local level. The minutes of the Presbytery of Erie, meeting a month after the General Assembly, indicate the effect.

> Presbytery being informed by their commissioner to the General Assembly that moral associations have been formed in many parts of our church, and have been successful in checking immorality, and that the assembly at their late sessions have earnestly recommended the formation of such societies, deem it their duty to make known to the churches under their care the wish of the Assembly on this subject, confidently believing that they will cheerfully give their united aid in endeavoring to suppress Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, profane swearing, gambling, and all immoralities within their bounds.[65]

Again in 1817 the General Assembly praised the moral societies. Speaking of the prevalence of various vices, the Assembly noted that "In many instances, however, a check has been given to these degrading and sinful practices, by the salutary operation of moral societies." The Assembly believed that these societies "if instituted on proper principles, and conducted with suitable prudence, promise to be very useful in laying, at least, an outward restraint upon the disturbers of the peace and order of society."[66]

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[65] Quoted in Eaton, History of the Presbytery of Erie, p. 82.

[66] MGA, I, 648.

The largest of these moral societies, the New Jersey Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality, was founded in 1816 and affords some insight into the nature of these societies. The society listed fifteen ministers among its managers, eight of which were Presbyterian. (Asa Hillyer, John F. Clark, Isaac V. Brown, Samuel B. How, William Schenck, Jonathan Freeman, George S. Woodhull, David Comfort and John M'Dowell.) Of the fifteen, six were also managers of the New Jersey Bible Society. Five of this six were Presbyterian.[67] The constitution of the society listed as its principal object "to carry into full effect the laws of the state against vice and immorality, by aiding the civil authorities." The society would seek to prevent rather than punish crime and resort to legal coercion only when "persuasion, admonition, and other mild measures, are found ineffectual."[68]

In 1818 in an address to the public, it was noted that the society had been formed because efforts to enforce the existing laws were insufficient. While the society did not intend to invade the province of the civil magistrates, it would prod those who failed to do their job and support those faithful servants who would appreciate the help of the "most worthy part of the community." The society assured the public that they had no intention of trespassing on the rights of conscience, but declared that freedom of conscience did not mean "liberty to perpetuate vice and practice immoralities." It was the society's conviction that, "In opposing what all admit to be vicious or injurious to society, no man's conscience can be violated." The exact nature of the society's concerns became clear when the address called upon

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[67] New Jersey Bible Society, Fifth Report of the Board of Managers (Trenton, 1815), p. 2; ibid., Sixth Report (1816), p. 2.

[68] New Jersey Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality, Constitution, pp. 3-4.

> all those who are in the habit of profaning that day, devoted by all Christian Denominations to religious worship, upon profane swearers, men of intemperance, and those who openly violate the laws of our country and corrupt public morals, by horse-racing and gambling, and the abettors of crime and disorder of every kind . . . to turn from such evil ways.

Such crimes the society designated as "weapons of rebellion against civil government, social order, domestic enjoyment, and true piety."[69]

While these societies emphasized the work of persuasion in their publicly announced intentions, there is some evidence that at least some of the individuals involved wanted to use immediately the full force of the law to attain these ends. The Cambridge Moral Society in New York announced in its constitution that its methods would be "example, affectionate persuasion, admonition, and in the extreme, legal coercion." In a sermon before the society in 1815, however, Nathaniel Prime called for a hundred men,

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[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 6-12.

"if necessary," to arrest Sabbath breakers in that town.

> Only let the work be vigorously carried on for two or three Sabbaths, and the information will be spread through this whole region, that the people of this town, in concert with the rest of the country, have set out with a determination to have the Sabbath respected--that there is not the smallest hope of escaping, and that all who obstinately transgress will be punished with rigour, and your work is done.

For Prime the question was not "whether men shall be permitted to break the Sabbath or not, but which is the most eligible and effectual way to prevent them?"[70]

It was the hope of the New Jersey moral society that their venture would succeed and "lead to associations of a like kind, in every part of the Union," as had been the case with the Philadelphia Bible Society.[71] Such overt activity, however, simply was not a viable approach, as it produced immediate hostility from large segments of the American population. The response to Gardiner Spring's attempt to promote Sabbath "reform" in New York is illustrative. Spring preached a series of sermons relating to the observation of the Sabbath, in the course of which he obtained the cooperation and help of the mayor and other local officials. A public meeting to carry out the reform was arranged, over which Spring was to preside. Upon arriving at the city hall, Spring and a companion came face to face with an angry mob.

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[70] Prime, An Address . . . (1815), pp. 9, 20-21.

[71] New Jersey Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality, Constitution, p. 7.

In recalling the incident, Spring wrote, "We forced our way through the crowd, and found ourselves in the midst of an indignant assemblage, passing resolutions *requesting the ministers to mind their own business*." Spring was forced to flee for his life.[72]

While the societies were not able to secure direct governmental aid or to implement their desires for American society directly through the police power of the state, they still possessed the advantages of union and the possibility of support from influential public figures who also wanted to promote the "association between Religion and Patriotism." These advantages alone were sufficient to make the societies a more attractive alternative than the denomination as a method of promoting the national concerns of Presbyterians.

VII

In the various attempts to establish a closer working relationship with the nation's "patriots" through the societies, the Presbyterians never lost sight of the primacy of the role of religion in the life of the nation. However much they would have appreciated the use of law to place an "outward restraint upon the disturbers of the peace and order of society"[73] they firmly believed that ultimately even the proper functioning of law depended on the religious character of the nation. It was the "knowledge of the Lord" revealed in the Bible that taught "the magistrate how to rule and the citizen how to be governed."[74] Even the repressive Prime could echo in sincerity the Presbyterian position that "no nation can long exist, without the influence of virtue, and religion, the only legitimate parent of virtue."[75]

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[72] Quoted in Knapp, *History of the Brick Presbyterian Church*, pp. 241-242.

[73] MGA, I, 648.

If, as the Presbytery of Hanover claimed in a memorial to the General Assembly of Virginia, religion could flourish without the aid of the state but the state could not survive without the aid of religion, the Presbyterians were no less willing to stand by and watch the nation perish for the want of "the knowledge of the Lord" than they were to allow the demise of religion. The first General Assembly had recognized as its duty to the nation, in cooperation with the other religious denominations, "to render men sober, honest, and industrious citizens."[76] This was the other side of the "association between Religion and Patriotism" and the Presbyterians soon discovered that this could not be performed on a national basis through the denominations. It was the societies rather than the denominations which undertook this task for the majority of the American populace. As John Holt Rice said of the United Domestic Missionary Society, it "aims to make their countrymen sober, peaceful, industrious citizens."[77]

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[74] Samuel Blatchford, _The Excellency of the Scriptures_ (Albany, 1811), p. 20.

[75] Prime, _An Address . . ._ (1815), p. 3.

[76] MGA, I, 12.

The necessity for some agency beyond the denomination was predicated on the fact that the traditional forms of organized religion influenced only certain portions of the American population. The general estimate that only ten per cent or less of Americans were communicating members of churches reveals only a part of the problem, as a much larger proportion of the population was influenced by Christianity in its social and political outlook. It was the latter status that was of concern to the "association between Religion and Patriotism." Even in the millennium individuals would experience religious conversion, but the entire society would be ordered according to the "knowledge of the Lord." In this respect, the problem in America was more nearly defined in terms of social classes within society than in terms of the "saved" and the "damned."

This feature was clearly demonstrated in the report of the trustees of the General Assembly in 1800. In listing those who should be objects of missionary efforts the trustees pointed to several definite classes of people. These were Negroes, Indians, the "destitute" of the frontiers and the "poor." Significantly, those societies which listed the objects of their attention reflected this same pattern.[78] These were the classes in America not governed by the influence of Christianity and therefore those that threatened the nation with providential ruin and the loss of its peculiar liberties. Since the Presbyterians had little impact on these groups through their denominational efforts, they had another powerful incentive to turn to the societies to promote the "association between Religion and Patriotism."

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[77] Rice, Charity at Home, p. 30.

The concern of the societies for Indians and free Negroes has been touched on briefly above, and needs no further explanation. The connection of the societies with the frontier and the fear of its relapse into "barbarism" which would shift the political and social balance of the nation has been recognized by a number of historians.[79] Because of what might be properly termed an overemphasis on the frontier as an interpretative framework, the importance of the poor in the cities as a cause of concern for the societies has been largely overlooked. For this reason this class will serve to illustrate the accessibility of the societies to portions of the American population not reached by the denominations. Constance McLaughlin Green has argued that "The swift rise of cities is a feature of American history no less significant and dramatic than the swift march of the frontier."[80] This general thesis receives additional support in the development of the societies.

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[78] Cf. Bible Society of Philadelphia, Second Report (1810), pp. 7-10; New York Bible Society, Second Annual Report (New York, 1811), pp. 9-11; Bible Society of the District of Columbia, First Report (n.p., 1816), pp. 3-7.

[79] Colin B. Goodykoontz, Home Missions on the American Frontier: With Particular Reference to the American Home Missionary Society (Caldwell, Idaho, 1939); Ellen Harriett Thomsen, "Protestant Westward Migration, 1830-1839," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXVI (March, 1948), 44-66; William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religion in America (rev. ed., New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 243-257.

In their concern for the poor of the cities the societies reflected the belief in a connection between religion and national prosperity which was characteristic of the movement as a whole and which was attractive to Presbyterians. In the view of most Presbyterians of the period there was a direct correspondence between poverty and wickedness. Jacob Janeway reflected this view when he concluded that "the poor are vicious" and it was "a work worthy of a rational creature to endeavour to reclaim them, and make them virtuous and pious."[81] Thus poverty alone was appalling because of its influence on the moral character of the nation. This was particularly the case since more and more of the "poor" were being numbered among that class of citizens which selected the nation's rulers and influenced the nation's law makers. The solution offered by the societies was "religious instruction" which would at once encourage "honesty and industry" and build good citizenship.

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[80] American Cities in the Growth of the Nation, Colophon Books (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 2.

[81] Jacob Janeway, The Blessedness of the Charitable (Philadelphia, 1812), p. 12.

Archibald Alexander summarized the predicament of Presbyterians when he indicated that the poor "need religious instruction more than others" but that "in most of the Protestant churches in our large cities, you see very few of the poorest of the people."[82] Rice reflected the same problem but in his own typical fashion. He explained that "societies taught and disciplined as Christians" were "industrious, frugal, and economical." For that reason there were no Christian paupers. The church people, Rice claimed, were the "most thriving people in the country."[83] Without considering the merits of his argument, he seems to have been correct in the final assertion.

This concentration of the upper classes in the Presbyterian churches in the cities was assisted by the deliberate action of the Presbyterian clergy. Rice himself gloried that many of the Virginia aristocracy who "formerly never went to church at all" had become Presbyterians. When Rice went to Richmond in 1812 as pastor of a newly formed church, one of his first activities was to persuade the congregation to sell the partially completed church and build "more centrally" so they could attract a larger and wealthier clientele.[84] John Blair Smith succeeded in transforming the Pine Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia from a lower middle class church to an upper class congregation in a new location with a chandelier from London and a wigged sexton, "the crucial rung on the ladder of social prestige."[85] The Brick Presbyterian Church in New York, which paid Gardiner Spring a salary twelve times the size of the annual missionary wages of the General Assembly, moved locations twice in the first quarter of the nineteenth century in order to keep near its wealthy members.[86]

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[82] Alexander, Pastoral Office, p. 20.

[83] Rice, Charity at Home, p. 31.

[84] Maxwell, Memoirs of Rice, pp. 54-55, 100-103.

Under these circumstances the poor in the cities remained largely unchurched. In New York there was a concentration of sixteen churches in the wealthiest section which was only half the size of the poverty ridden seventh ward, which had a population of 12,000, an estimated 2,000 prostitutes, and one church. In 1817 it was estimated that there were no religious provisions for 42,000 of the poor in New York. The estimates of Philadelphia in 1823 and 1826 ranged from 55,000 to 80,000 unchurched poor.[87]

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[85] Charles Grier Sellers, "John Blair Smith," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXXIV (December, 1956), 220.

[86] Knapp, History of Brick Presbyterian Church, pp. 158-159.

[87] James Patterson, A Sermon Preached for the Young Ladies's Missionary Society, of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1826), p. 12; Young Men's Domestic Missionary Society of Philadelphia, An Appeal to the Citizens of Philadelphia, In Behalf of Domestic Missions (Philadelphia, 1824), pp. 10-11; Charles I. Foster, "The Urban Missionary Movement, 1814-1837," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXXV (January, 1951), 47-51.

While the churches were serving the upper classes, the societies would provide religious instruction for the poor. While this is apparent in much of the literature, it was bluntly stated by a youthful writer for the Bible Society of Union College.

> Callous, indeed, must be that heart, which is unmoved by the degradation and impiety, which abound among the destitute and the uncivilized. How often have we witnessed scenes, which shock the ear of modesty, and benumb the sensibility of the virtuous and refined--scenes, which emphatically proclaim the fallen nature of man. . . . True, these shocking and destructive vices are not confined to the poor. The middle and the higher walks of life, we know, abound with most of them. But the reformation of these, under the divine blessing, we leave to the means which they enjoy; to the Word of God and to the preaching of that Word. We turn our attention to the profligate and the vicious among the children of poverty. . . . Being suffered to grow up without any moral instruction, neither a love of virtue, nor a sense of duty operates as a check upon their conduct.[88]

From an early date the Presbyterians recognized that some extraordinary measures were required for the religious instruction of the poor in the cities. The Presbyterian Society for the Promotion of Religion in the Benevolent Institutions of the City of Philadelphia was founded in 1802 to provide a chaplain for prisons and almshouses. The society acknowledged that its motives were "partly of the political kind" since without religious instruction the occupants of these institutions "may become the pests of society."[89]

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[88] Bible Society of Union College, Constitution (Schenectady, New York, 1815), pp. 13-14.

[89] A Plan for Establishing a Chaplain, of the Presbyterian Denomination, in the Jail, Hospital, and Bettering-House, of the City of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1802), pp. 3-12.

Archibald Alexander's "Evangelical Society" came out of his concern for the poor in the city who could not afford pew rent. Alexander secured the services of about twenty "gentlemen" of various Philadelphia congregations to teach Bible classes in the poor districts.[90]

A similar effort was made by Presbyterians in New York to provide religious instruction for the poor in the city's institutions, but that was a cooperative enterprise from the beginning. Ezra Stiles Ely initiated the action in 1810 with *A Sermon for the Rich to Buy that They May Benefit the Poor and Themselves*. This called the attention of the "religious public" to the problem and a "subscription was drafted, and subscribed by a number of individuals who were principally of the Presbyterian and Dutch communion," to hire Ely as the "stated chaplain" of the city's institutions. Again the need for this religious instruction of the poor was recognized in terms of "future pests of society."[91]

This kind of effort was only partial as it ignored the vast numbers of the poor who never were confined to these institutions. As the other societies began to be formed, the poor were of primary concern. The Bible Society of

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[90] Alexander, *Life of Alexander*, pp. 209-303.

[91] Ezra Stiles Ely, *Visits of Mercy: or the Journals of Ezra Stiles Ely* (2 vols.; Sixth ed., revised, Philadelphia, 1829), pp. xiii-xv. These volumes are based on a diary which Ely kept while working in the institutions and contain valuable information on the condition of the poor.

Philadelphia announced that "the poor, generally, will thus claim the peculiar notice of the Society." Since the Bible could "teach the knave to be honest, the drunkard to be sober, and the prophane to be pious," it was "the glory and safety of the nation."[92]

The New York Bible Society also turned its attention primarily to the poor of the cities. The society claimed that as a result of Bible distribution poverty had been eleviated, the morals of free Negroes elevated, and that seamen were "fast yielding to a settled character for sobriety, frugality, and industry." The society also took note that it was working in close harmony with a "Society for the Prevention of Pauperism."[93] The Charlestown Bible Society also reported primary concern for the poor and announced that "a small society . . . for the promotion of Honesty and Industry" had dissolved and transferred its funds to the Bible society.[94]

The Bible Society of the District of Columbia saw Bible distribution as one of the most efficient remedies of pauperism.

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[92] Bible Society of Philadelphia, First Report (1809), pp. 7-10.

[93] New York Bible Society, Second Annual Report (1811), pp. 9-11.

[94] Bible Society of Charleston, Second Report of the Managers (Charlestown, 1812), p. 10.

> It has actually been found that, in proportion to the dissemination of the scriptures, a vicious has given way to a virtuous practice. Idleness has been supplanted by industry, intemperance by sobriety, and general improvidence by prudent management. Thus, a powerful antidote is formed to pauperism and all its direful train of miseries.[95]

In this attempt to provide religious instruction for the poor, the Bible societies were joined by the tract societies. Tracts were viewed as a "method of instruction . . . peculiarly calculated for the poor." Through the distribution of tracts "the blessings of a religious education" could be "extended to the lower ranks of society with peculiar facility."[96]

The Sunday School unions came to occupy a place of central importance in the instruction of the poor. Bibles and tracts were useless unless they could be read, and the American poor did not read. Using the Bible as the basic text, the Sunday Schools sought to eliminate that problem. Through the Sunday Schools the poor were provided "such an education as might be attained in pious and well regulated families." In this fashion the New York Sunday School Union Society promised to curtail the "innumerable evils which spring from ignorance and want; that idleness, larceny, mendicancy, and the various forms of wickedness perpetrated by the lower classes."[97]

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[95] Bible Society of the District of Columbia, First Report (1816), p. 3.

[96] American Tract Society, Address of the Executive Committee (New York, 1825), p. 5.

[97] New York Sunday School Union Society, First Report (New York, 1817), pp. 6, 14-16.

For this New York society there was a direct relationship between religious instruction for the poor and the welfare of the nation. The society believed that "the continuance of civil and religious liberty, which, from a form of government adopted to secure that blessing to the country, is so dependent on the intelligence, the morality, and the happiness of the lower classes of society." This condition could only be brought about under the influence of Christianity. The religion of the Sunday schools was the "religion of the Bible," and it was that religion which the Sunday schools "looked to for the guardianship and security of the social and civil, as well as the immortal interests of man."[98]

The Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union confirmed this opinion.

> The importance of gratuitous instruction whether to adults, or children, cannot be estimated, either with respect to its political or religious influence. We may select men, the most renowned for wisdom, to enact laws: and fill our pulpits with persons of the most eminent talents and piety, yet, if the body of the people remain uninstructed in the great leading truths of divine revelation, no permanent foundation can be laid either for present or future happiness.[99]

Because of the reluctance of the clergy generally to foster Sunday schools in the first decade and a half of the nineteenth century, the place of Sunday schools in the society network has been called into question. Foster has understood this development as an early separateness or distinctness and a later integration which he characterizes as a "capture of the whole Sunday-school movement for the Evangelical united front." This was a part of the "naturalization of the united front" in America. Yet, the earlier lay-oriented Sunday school movement better fits Foster's general thesis than the "naturalized" version.[100]

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[98] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[99] Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, Sixth Report (1823), p. 8.

Presbyterian participation in the Sunday school movement was brought about by their awareness of its potential to exert influence over those beyond the pale of organized religion. Because of their insistence on trained and carefully supervised "public teachers," opposition to Sunday schools would have been consistent with their general philosophy but Presbyterians were perhaps the earliest and most ardent clerical exponents of Sunday schools. The Presbyterians were not easily captured.

A primary factor in Presbyterian support of Sunday schools was their utility in promoting religious instruction among the poor. Alexander's "Evangelical Society" in Philadelphia was founded to "promote the knowledge of and submission to the Gospel of Jesus Christ" among the poor in the city. This society is regarded as one of the forerunners of the Sunday school unions, and was actively supported by Ashbel Green and Jacob Janeway.[101] Alexander became a lifelong friend of Sunday schools, one of the most prolific writers for the American Sunday School Union, introduced graded instruction, and wrote a Vindication of Sunday-Schools. One of Alexander's most widely circulated works was "The Poor Man's Guide and Friend," in which he dwelt on the advantages of being poor over being rich and encouraged the poor to be good citizens.[102] Sunday schools became a family tradition and Alexander's son, James Waddell, was the author of over thirty volumes of Sunday school material.[103]

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[100] Foster, Errand of Mercy, pp. 157-159.

Other Presbyterians supported Sunday schools from an early date. John M'Dowell first introduced Sunday schools in New Jersey in 1814 for the poor of Newark. In 1816 he prepared Lessons for Bible Classes, which sold over 100,000 copies, for use in Sunday schools.[104] At the meeting of the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union in 1820 all three ministerial speakers were noted Presbyterians. John Holt Rice, the featured speaker, praised the "unity" of the movement and declared Sunday schools to be a more valuable and cheaper method of providing religious education for the poor than schools supported by state legislatures. The other speakers were Jacob Janeway and Ezra Stiles Ely, who emphasized the necessity of the "implantation" of religious principles in the young and the consequent beneficial effect on society.[105] Ashbel Green and Moses Hoge also supported this society and in New York John B. Romeyn, Gardiner Spring and Alexander M'Clelland were active in Sunday schools.[106]

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[101] Edwin Wilbur Rice, The Sunday School Movement, 1780-1917, and the American Sunday School Union (Philadelphia, 1917), p. 51; Alexander, Life of Alexander, pp. 297-303.

[102] Archibald Alexander, Practical Truths (New York, n.d.), pp. 221-236.

[103] Rice, The Sunday School Movement, pp. 122-124, 135.

[104] William B. Sprague, Memoirs of the Rev. John McDowell and the Rev. William A. McDowell (New York, 1864), pp. 61-63.

At the meeting for the formation of the American Sunday School Union in 1824 Presbyterian participation was conspicuous. The records note that "Many of the reverend members of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church now in session in this city were present." Three of the four speakers were Presbyterian and the motion to form the union was made and seconded by Presbyterians.[107]

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[105] Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, *Third Report* (1820), pp. 1-4, 75.

[106] Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, *Sixth Report* (1823), p. 83; New York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools, *Third Report* (New York, 1819), p. 2; *ibid.*, *Fourth Report* (1820), p. 2; *ibid.*, *Eighth Report* (1824), p. 2. The first three hired agents of the Philadelphia union were Presbyterian ministers (William C. Blair, Timothy Alden, and M. A. Remley). Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, *Fifth Report* (1822), p. 11; *ibid.*, *Seventh Report* (1824), p. 8.

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 88. Speakers were Gardiner Spring,

Presbyterian support of the Sunday school movement was consistent with their own belief in the power of education, their desires for the nation and the consequent need to provide religious instruction for the poor. It was also consistent with the situation of the society movement generally after 1816. Prior to that time many of the Bible societies had considered such instruction as within their jurisdiction. After 1816, however, the American Bible Society would recognize as auxiliary societies only those whose sole function was the distribution of the Bible "without note or comment." It is not then surprising that Sunday school unions were founded with rapidity after that date.[108]

In many ways the most crucial of the societies in the attempt to provide religious instruction for the poor in America's cities were the local domestic missionary societies. These associations hired missionaries, who were more often than not Presbyterian, who worked in the poor districts and coordinated the activities of the other societies. These men preached, organized Sunday schools and distributed tracts and Bibles. The emphasis was always on the poor and their

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Timothy Alden and William L. M'Calla. The motion, recognizing that Sunday schools were "exerting a powerful and most beneficial influence over all classes of society," was made by Thomas Bradford, a Presbyterian layman of Philadelphia, and seconded by Gardiner Spring.

[108] An Appeal to the Christians of America, p. 16; Henry Otis Dwight, The Centennial History of the American Bible Society (2 vols.; New York: Macmillan Co., 1916), I, 43; Bible Society of Frederick County, Virginia, First Annual Report (Winchester, Virginia, 1814), p. 10.

need of religious instruction. Jonas King, Presbyterian missionary for the Charlestown Female Domestic Missionary Society, asked the rhetorical question, "What renders some parts of our own society, better men than others?" and quickly answered "Because they have received more *religious* instruction." It was only religion which could cure the "prodigality . . . , idleness . . . and indigence" which produced the poor.[109]

The Young Men's Domestic Missionary Society of Philadelphia claimed that it intended to eradicate the "disease of the mind" and make useful members of society of the poor and vicious "who are now its greatest nuisances."[110] James Patterson, Presbyterian missionary for the Philadelphia Missionary Society, spoke of the "deplorable ignorance that prevails among the lower classes." He warned his audience that unless "religious instruction" were provided for the 80,000 poor of Philadelphia, they could see "the very foundations of society sapped before your eyes." It was Patterson's belief that "religion, and that too the Christian religion . . . alone contains in it the seeds of social order and stability and . . . alone can make us happy and preserve us."[111]

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[109] Jonas King, *Report, Read, May 20, to the Female Domestic Missionary Society of Charleston, South Carolina* (Charlestown, 1820), pp. 10-12.

[110] *Appeal to the Citizens of Philadelphia*, p. 5.

[111] *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

The salvation offered by the societies was of the this-worldly collective variety based on indoctrination, rather than an other-worldly individual salvation based on conversion. Their primary goal was not to snatch "souls" from the "jaws of hell" but to "promote the political and moral health of the nation" and "spread the knowledge of the redeemer and his salvation over the earth, and introduce that happy state of things, when knowledge, righteousness and peace shall pervade the world."[112] This being the case, the societies looked not for the "lost" individual but for those "classes" which they believed most threatened those goals--the Indians, the Negroes, the frontiersmen, and the poor in the cities.

VIII

The Presbyterians began their career in the new American nation by a reorganization of their institutional life. The product of that reorganization, The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, was admirably suited for the internal government of the "Presbyterian Church" but was unable to promote the ideal of the "association between Religion and Patriotism" which Presbyterians held necessary to the "United States of America."

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[112] American Home Missionary Society, Constitution, p. 46; Bible Society of Philadelphia, Second Report (1810), p. 11.

Driven by a doctrine of providence to seek the welfare of the nation in its religious character and spurred by the theocratic vision of the millennium, the Presbyterians hoped to achieve their ambitions for the nation through voluntary societies. On a practical level alone, the societies possessed certain advantages over the denomination. The denomination was designed for internal government which was time-consuming and divisive, left little time or energy for other concerns, and could not be changed with ease. On the other hand, a society could easily be formed for a single purpose and devote all its attention to that goal. These practical advantages coincided with powerful ideological ingredients and made the societies particularly attractive to Presbyterians. In addition to the unity of Christians which seemed to bring the millennium closer, the societies offered the benefits of an "association between Religion and Patriotism" at two levels. In the societies religious figures could associate with the nation's public figures and through this association influence those classes of American society which most threatened the Presbyterian hopes for the nation.

EPILOGUE

The strength of the Presbyterians to implement their national goals through the voluntary societies was dissipated in the schism of 1837. In many ways, however, the end of an era in Presbyterian history and in the history of religion in America had come around 1826 with the founding of the great national societies. Within a few years after 1826 the Old School Presbyterians, who had been the most ardent supporters of societies in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, began to reject voluntary associations and in so doing developed a theory of the denomination which proclaimed the denomination itself to be a missionary society which neither required supplementation by, nor received benefit from non-ecclesiastical organizations. By the schism of 1837 the Old School party was prepared to act on this theory and thus withdrew its support from the societies. Why did this happen? An epilogue is no place to attempt to offer definitive answers to complex questions, but from an investigation of the period prior to 1826, some suggestions may be proposed for consideration.

It would be tempting to view the withdrawal of the Old School from the society movement as a growth of sectarianism, but the Old School was basically no more sectarian in 1837 than Presbyterianism had been in 1797. It was simply that the Presbyterian position relative to other denominations had changed from one of potential dominance to one of threatened equality. In this situation the apparent ecumenism easily fell aside to reveal the underlying sectarianism.

Participation in the societies cannot be understood as unequivocally nonsectarianism. The societies were sectarian in the sense that they operated on broadly Calvinistic or Reformed principles and worked to the benefit of those denominations adhering to the Westminster Confession. Many of the societies adopted Calvinist confessions of faith.[1] Missionary Societies were concerned about the "orthodoxy" and education of their missionaries, both of which reflected a Reformed bias.[2] The New York Religious Tract Society printed 5,000 copies of the Larger Catechism and called it "one of the best systems of Divinity which has ever been selected from Holy Scriptures."[3] Even the American Bible Society, which was so scrupulously "non-sectarian" that it refused to open its meetings with prayer or have sermons, alienated some Episcopalians and Baptists.[4] The sectarian spirit so prevailed in the New York Missionary Society that a resolution to appoint any minister in good standing in the Dutch Reformed, Associate Reformed or Presbyterian denominations failed by a vote of 182 to 91. The majority did not want to appoint "Hopkinsian" ministers even if in good standing in one of these strongly Calvinist denominations. The whole affair led to a schism in the society.[5] Several contemporary historians have pointed to the fact that the societies were sectarian in their activity as well as organization.[6]

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[1] Cf. Northern Missionary Society, Constitution, p. 15; New York Missionary Society, Constitution, pp. 13-17.

[2] King, Report, pp. 19-20; Philadelphia Missionary Society, Charter and By-laws (Philadelphia, 1814), p. 4; New York Missionary Magazine and Repository of Religious Intelligence, I, 102.

[3] Third Annual Report (New York, 1815), pp. 3-4.

[4] First Report (1817), pp. 20-21; Dwight, History of the American Bible Society, II, 37, 62.

Because of the Presbyterian position relative to other denominations in the Middle and Southern states in the early years of the nineteenth century, it was relatively easy to retain a position of dominance in the associations while claiming to be non-sectarian. Ranking second nationally in numbers of churches, Presbyterian strength was even greater because of its concentration in this area. Their strongest rivals, the Episcopalians, were laboring under various disabilities and the Methodists and Baptists were weak in both numbers and influence. The lesser Reformed denominations could be counted on as reliable allies whose own power was not threatening.

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[5] (Gardiner Spring), A Brief View of the Facts, Which Gave Rise to the New York Evangelical Missionary Society of Young Men (New York, 1817), pp. 4-19.

[6] Frederick Kuhns, "Religious Rivalries in the Old Northwest," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXXVI (March, 1958), 19-51; Whitney R. Cross, The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950), pp. 126-237.

By 1830, however, the situation had changed. The Methodists and Baptists now outnumbered Presbyterians. In this situation the facade of non-sectarianism was maintained with greater difficulty. John Holt Rice, for example, in arguing the necessity of religion to the national welfare in 1830 found it necessary, unlike Witherspoon or Smith, to distinguish among kinds of Christians. Rice rejected the "superstitious," the "enthusiast" and the "fanatic"--by which he appears to have meant Roman Catholics, Methodists and Baptists--as exponents of "true religion." Turning to a discussion of the evils of sectarianism, Rice identified sectarianism with those religious groups who did not cooperate in the societies.[7] By 1830 the "sectarian" groups had become so large that those claiming to be "non-sectarian" did so only with difficulty.

But more important from the Old School point of view was the fact that after 1826 their position of dominance in the societies was threatened by Congregationalism. A fact often overlooked is that previous to 1826 the "national" societies were very largely regional and therefore dominated either by Congregationalists or Presbyterians. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was a New England Society with token representation from the rest of the nation. The American Education Society was likewise primarily

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[7] Rice, Religion, pp. 15-43.

Congregationalist while the Presbyterian Education Society in New York and societies auxiliary to the General Assembly's Board of Education was supported by Presbyterians. The American Tract Society was located in Boston and the New York Religious Tract Society, which was larger, served the Middle and Southern states. On the other hand, the American Bible Society, the American Colonization Society and the American Sunday-School Union were largely controlled by Presbyterians and their allies of the Middle and Southern states. Perhaps of even greater significance is the fact that the United Domestic Missionary Society was the creation of the Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed and Associate Reformed denominations. Thus the pattern of cooperation between Presbyterians and Congregationalists in the societies was very much like that of the relationships between the official denominational bodies. There were formal communications and exchange of official voting representatives between them but the balance of power was decisively one-sided in each case.

Around 1826 this pattern changed to one of more equal strength in all the national societies. In 1825 the older American Tract Society and the New York Religious Tract Society joined to form a new American Tract Society. In that same year the Presbyterian Education Society of New York united with the American Education Society. In 1826 the United Foreign Missionary Society, organized by the Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed and Associate Reformed denominations in 1817, united with the New England based American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The American Home Missionary Society, organized in 1826, was a unification of the United Domestic Missionary Society with various New England societies. In 1829 the powerful Connecticut Bible Society became auxiliary to the American Bible Society. It was only after this series of mergers that Presbyterian hegemony in the societies in which they participated was in doubt. It was also only after this development that various Old School Presbyterians began to criticize the societies and propose that all activity carried on through the societies ought to be conducted under the responsible eye of the denominational judicatories.

Professor James Fulton Maclear has dealt suggestively with the attempts of New England Congregationalists to perpetuate their theocratic heritage in the face of disestablishment. Maclear designated the disestablished version of the New England theocratic ideal as "the 'true American union' of church and people," a concept in many ways parallel to the "association between Religion and Patriotism." One of the results of disestablishment in New England was that it "emancipated the Puritan tradition from its purely local reference." According to Maclear, "by the 1820's provincialism had been shed" and the Puritan heritage successfully invaded "other denominations and sections." The voluntary societies were primary instruments in this movement. According to Maclear, "Coincident with the fall of the New England

Establishments, an expansion of interdenominational societies was undertaken."[8] This surge of New England energy threatened Presbyterian dominance of the societies and became a source of agony for the Old School Presbyterians, who had been pursuing their own theocratic vision through the societies for some time.[9]

The much discussed Plan of Union, which led to a sort of fusion of Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the Presbyterian denomination and became a source of dissatisfaction among Old School Presbyterians, should also be viewed in a similar light. The development under the Plan of Union was only the largest example of a pattern of cooperation leading to organic unity which was repeated a number of times throughout the Middle and Southern States. The Plan of Union of 1801 envisioned the coexistence of Presbyterian and Congregational churches, presbyteries and associations, and provided a system whereby ministers of both denominations could serve churches of either group. In addition, the plan provided for churches of mixed membership. An "Accommodation Plan" of 1808 enabled Congregational churches to affiliate with presbyteries. In practice, the associations of New York found it to their advantage to disband and unite with presbyteries. This often occurred after the formation of voluntary societies in which joint cooperation proved beneficial. The result was that most ministers and churches of this area officially became Presbyterian. The exact number of Congregational churches becoming Presbyterian is disputed, but the best estimate seems to be about six hundred.[10]

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[8] "'The True American Union' of Church and State: The Reconstruction of the Theocratic Tradition," Church History, XXVIII (March, 1959), 53-56.

[9] There is a real question as to whether or not the Old School fears were justified, but they were none the less real. Whitney R. Cross has indicated that the Presbyterians continued to gain the most from the operations of the societies in upstate New York in the years following 1826. Burned-over District, pp. 128-137.

This pattern was followed in other areas except that in every other case the rate of absorption into the Presbyterian denomination was much slower. In New York City the Presbyterians and Associate Reformed cooperated in the societies throughout the period. In 1822 organic union was consummated with portions of the Associate Reformed denomination. This union brought churches from New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, D.C. into the Presbyterian organization.[11] In South Carolina in 1822 the Charlestown Congregational Association dissolved and united with Harmony Presbytery. Members of these two bodies had also cooperated in voluntary societies previous to the merger.[12] Overtures passed between the Reformed Dutch Church and the Presbyterian General Assembly which resulted in a plan of correspondence in 1823 but brought about no organic unity.[13] Instances of individual Dutch Reformed churches becoming Presbyterian, however, were numerous.[14]

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[10] Frederick Kuhns, "New Light on the Plan of Union," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXVI (March, 1948), 43.

[11] Ezra Hall Gillett, History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (2 vols.; rev. ed., Philadelphia, 1864), II, 231-237; B. F. Bittinger, The Rise, Progress, and Influence of Presbyterianism in the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C., 1895), pp. 10-11; S. D. Alexander, The Presbytery of New York, 1738 to 1888 (New York, 1888), pp. 87-93.

[12] Gillett, History of the Presbyterian Church, II, 65-67.

As in the case of cooperation with weaker Reformed denominations in the societies, these smaller accretions caused the Old School little agony. It was only the Plan of Union area where Congregationalist elements had reached a stage of potential domination that was a source of concern. As in the case of the voluntary societies, the Old School was happy when Presbyterian dominance was unthreatened. The difference, of course, was that the Plan of Union more directly affected the internal affairs of the denomination. While withdrawal from the societies could be effected easily, a reversal of the influx of Congregationalists into the denomination required schism.

II

Another change in the societies after 1826 which alienated the Old School was their alignment with revivalism. Revivalism was also associated with the influence of Congregationalism in the Plan of Union area and became a divisive issue between the growing parties within

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[13] _Ibid_., 231.

[14] Parsons, _Rochester Presbytery_, _passim_.

Presbyterianism and between the Old School and the societies. In moving toward revivalism the societies retained their national goals but emphasized conversion rather than instruction. From the Old School viewpoint, which best represented continuity with the past, this change was all important. It was viewed as a change from reason and reflection to emotion and passion; from order and subordination in society to fanaticism and enthusiasm. These were believed to be as incompatible with good government and an ordered society as with true religion. This change also had grave social consequences. The instructed and uninstructed could easily be identified by social class. In the process of instruction in the "knowledge of the Lord" these classes could be indoctrinated in the appropriate conduct for their "station" in life. Servants could be taught how to obey their masters and the poor taught how to be content with their possessions. In the view of the revivalists the rich as well as the poor were numbered among the unconverted. Once converted, the poor became superior to the unconverted rich.

It is often asserted that the "benevolent societies --had come about as the fruit of what were called 'revivals of religion.'"[15] From the study of Presbyterianism prior to 1826 there appears to be no connection between revivalism and the early society movement. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, in those areas of Presbyterian domination, revivals and societies represented two different and perhaps mutually exclusive approaches to religion. The amalgamation of the two which took place rapidly after 1826 alienated a large portion of the early and ardent supporters of societies.

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[15] Bernard A. Weisberger, They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact Upon Religion in America (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), pp. 3-4.

Any use of the terms "revival" and "revivalism" requires some explanation. They are most commonly used to designate an approach to religious life which emphasizes the possibility and the necessity of the immediate conversion of any individual who chooses to be converted.[16] This would include the religious phenomena known as the Second Great Awakening and the revivals of Charles Finney, although there were differences between the two.

As a denomination, the Presbyterians consistently opposed such measures, notably in the Cumberland schism, until after 1826 when the influence of Finney began to be felt. There were Presbyterian "revivals" before 1826, but they were of a sort not usually recognized under that term. A "true revival" in the Presbyterian understanding was a time of "refreshing" within the church when there was an unusual seriousness among "professors" and when those properly instructed in the "system of doctrines" were converted by the action of the Holy Spirit. The ideal was doctrinal preaching for the purpose of convincing the mind of the truth. Any appeal to the "animal passions" or emotions was viewed with suspicion and any expression of emotions by the congregation was discouraged. Converts were carefully examined by the session to see if they could give "reason of the hope," which called for a rational and "orthodox" explanation of the Christian faith. Conversion and proper instruction in the "knowledge of the Lord" were considered inseparable. Thus "revivals" were usually confined largely to those already influenced by the denomination and were more properly a part of the internal development than an instrument to implement the national goals of Presbyterianism.[17]

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[16] William G. McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1959), pp. 9-10, 68-73.

On the basis of outward appearance, the revivals in western Pennsylvania from 1800 to 1803 were an exception to this general rule. Under predominately orthodox Presbyterian leadership, these revivals were characterized by extreme emotional outbursts and physical exertions. The Presbyterian ministers, however, taught publicly and privately that there was no "religion" in these exercises and a number of them were accused of "coldness" toward the revival. According to James Carnahan, an eye witness of these events, "People were exhorted to restrain their feelings and listen to the truths of God's Word."[18] Elisha Macurdy and John McMillan, the most active preachers during the revivals, spent more of their time in promoting religious education than in preaching. Macurdy carefully catechized his entire congregation. McMillan continued to write and memorize his sermons and personally taught theology to over one hundred ministers. McMillan's church at Cartiers only admitted 450 members on examination during his thirty-three year pastorate. The revivals of western Pennsylvania appear to have been the product of a popular expression of religion which the Presbyterian ministers sought to tame rather than oppose.[19] The ministers continued to argue that a rational understanding of the Christian religion was a prerequisite to conversion. In this the ministers of western Pennsylvania were in agreement with national Presbyterian sentiment and for that reason did not run into the same difficulties as the Cumberland Presbyterians in Kentucky. The fact is that even when there were emotional expressions in Presbyterian revivals before 1826, the priority of the catechism and the intellectual apprehension of the "knowledge of the Lord" was unquestioned and thus the revivals were confined to those "classes" already under the influence of the church.

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[17] Cf. Ashbel Green, A Report to the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, Relative to a Revival of Religion (Philadelphia, 1815); Autobiography of William Neill, ed. Joseph H. Jones (Philadelphia, 1861), pp. 30, 39-40; Mason, Writings, II, 216, 289-295; IV, 144-145; Jacob Van Vechten, Memoirs of John M. Mason (New York, 1856), p. 515; Gardiner Spring, Something Must Be Done (n.t.p.); Personal Reminiscences of the Life and Times of Gardiner Spring (2 vols.; New York, 1866), I, 215-238; Kollock, Sermons, III, 173-183, 225-226; McDowell, Fifty Years a Pastor, pp. 15-16; William B. Sprague, Memoirs of the Rev. John McDowell, and the Rev. William A. McDowell (New York, 1864), pp. 53-70; John Blair Hoge, Sketch of the Life and Character of the Rev. Moses Hoge, Historical Transcripts No. 2 (Library, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, Richmond, 1964), pp. 102-124.

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[18] Autobiography of John Johnston, p. 197.

[19] Ibid., pp. 52-53, 111, 114, 197-202; Guthrie, McMillan, pp. 22, 60-70, 80-98; David Elliot, The Life of the Rev. Elisha Macurdy (Allegheny, Pennsylvania, 1848), pp. 55-103.

The revivalism that swept through large portions of the Presbyterian denomination and became allied with the voluntary societies after 1826 was of a different sort. This was the revivalism of Charles G. Finney, which, with minor alterations to accommodate the respect for learning and social position among Congregationalists and Presbyterians, more nearly resembled the religion of the lower class, emotional and ignorant Methodists and Baptists of the frontier than the Presbyterian ideal.[20]

As this type of revivalism entered the Presbyterian churches of the Plan of Union area it was strongly resisted by Presbyterians of the Old School. While the Presbyteries of Geneva and Oneida wrote defenses of the revivals which were designed to make them appear acceptable on the Old School model, all were not so conciliatory.[21] Nathan S. S. Beman, known as the "War-horse of the New School," was one of the first to invite Finney to preach to his congregation. As moderator of the General Assembly in 1831, Beman gave the opening sermon before that body in 1832. Beman not only defended revivalism but attacked the Old School style of preaching intellectual and doctrinal sermons. He called on all Presbyterians to aim for "immediate success" in their preaching. "The Apostles," Beman declared, "never sent men home to think of a sermon: they urged repentance for sin, and submission to the terms of salvation."[22]

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[20] McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism, p. 22.

[21] Presbytery of Oneida, A Narrative of the Revival of Religion, in the County of Oneida, Particularly in the Bounds of the Presbytery of Oneida, in the Year 1826 (Utica, New York, 1826); Presbytery of Geneva, A Narrative of the Late Revivals of Religion, Within the Bounds of Geneva Presbytery (Geneva, New York, 1832).

Because of the association of the revivalism with the theology of Nathaniel Taylor of New England, which the Old School considered heretical, the growth of revivalism in the Plan of Union area further aggravated relationships between the Old School and the Congregationalists and New School. In many ways Albert Barnes, friend of Finney and arch exponent of "Taylorism," became the symbolic target of the Old School. Barnes became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia just after Finney had preached there. Presbyterians of Philadelphia were so opposed to any innovation in theology that they had classified Finney as a "crude Western exponent of Hopkinsianism," when in reality the Hopkinsians, although mildly revivalistic, likewise opposed the extremism of Finney. But in the center of conservative Presbyterianism, as Finney noted, "we are all hereticks, Alias Hopkintonians."[23] Coming into this situation, Barnes was immediately tried for heresy.

In a sermon before the students and faculty of

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[22] A Discourse . . . (n.p., 1832), p. 13.

[23] Quoted in McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism, pp. 43-44.

Princeton Theological Seminary in 1834, Barnes succinctly stated the primary difference between the growing parties in Presbyterianism. "Knowledge is good, but holiness is better."[24] Charles Foster has understood that the controversy between the New School and Old School "had to do with the saving of Presbyterian souls."[25] Barnes' statement pointed to the nature of that difference. The New School was stressing the ability of the sinner to achieve immediate conversion and live a life of holiness by an act of will, while the Old School continued to view conversion as an almost arbitrary act of the Holy Spirit operating through a correct apprehension of the "Knowledge of the Lord."

The Old School resented being called opposers of revivals and tried to direct the new energies into the old paths. The most notable effort was by William B. Sprague, who published _Lectures on Revivals of Religion_ in 1832. Sprague stated that it was his intention to "vindicate and advance the cause of _genuine_ revivals." In order to do this he would distinguish between a "_genuine_ revival and a spurious excitement" and "guard against the abuses to which revivals are liable."[26]

Although Sprague's work demonstrates a growing concern for conversion even among Old School Presbyterians, it is the finest exposition of the Old School ideal of revivalism. The value of the work is enhanced by an appendix with twenty supporting letters by well-known figures, including Alexander, Dana, Miller, McDowell, Neill, Green and Griffin. According to Sprague a revival was "a revival of scriptural knowledge; of vital piety; of practical obedience." The term was "intended to be applied in a general sense, to denote the improved state of a congregation." As a result of this, "increased zeal is usually rendered instrumental of the conversion of sinners."[27] Sprague thus confirmed the traditional Presbyterian idea that revivals were within the church and based on "knowledge," while his New School counterparts were moving toward conversion and "holiness" as a solution to the problems of the nation.

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[24] _The Power of Holiness in the Christian Ministry_ (Philadelphia, 1834), p. 3.

[25] _Errand of Mercy_, pp. 254-255.

[26] (Albany, New York, 1832), p. v.

While the Old School was busy fighting the growth of heresy and revivalism (both associated in their minds with New England Congregationalism) within the denomination, these forces were gaining control of the national voluntary societies. If the influx of Congregationalist influence around 1826 had caused concern among Old School Presbyterians, this new development alienated them even more. In 1829 Arthur and Lewis Tappan, wealthy New York businessmen who were becoming the most forceful leaders in the society movement, began to support Finney. According to William McLoughlin, the Tappans "brought Finney a host of new allies from these enterprises as well as enlisting his followers in them."[28] By 1830 revivalism and voluntary societies were embarked on a partnership that would give rise to the notion that they were interrelated from the beginning.

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[27] _Ibid_., p. 7.

William Sprague noted the recent coalescence of revivalism and the societies in 1832 in his Lectures on Revivals of Religion. Sprague attributed an advance of "moral renovation" in America to the work of the "benevolent institutions" and indicated that a primary reason for the promotion of "genuine revivals" rather than "spurious excitements" was that "this moral machinery, so far as our own country at least is concerned, is evidently to be sustained an increase through the influence of revivals." At another point Sprague declared,

> I hardly need say that all our great benevolent institutions--our Missionary, and Bible, and Tract, and Education, and Temperance, and all kindred institutions, have flourished most where the influences of God's grace have been most abundantly experienced; and I am sure that every thing in the aspect of Providence indicates that the spirit of revivals and the spirit of public charity are hereafter to go hand in hand--the one being sustained and cherished in a great degree by the other, until the earth shall be filled with the Redeemer's glory.[29]

The change in the society movement in the late 1820's that Foster recognized as the "quite thoroughly American" phase coming on the heels of a "distinctly British" one[30] appears to be rather the transition of the societies from the dominance of the more conservative Presbyterian, Old Calvinists and Hopkinsian Congregationalists to a predominantly revivalistic oriented leadership of New School Presbyterians and Congregationalists who were exponents of the theology of Nathaniel Taylor. In this transition the societies changed their approach from one of careful instruction for "classes" of people to the methods associated with revivalism.

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[28] Modern Revivalism, p. 53.

[29] Pp. 272-274.

[30] Errand of Mercy, p. 179.

This growing partnership between the societies and revivalism was evident in the temperance crusade. The American Temperance Society was founded in 1826. In the revivals of western New York conversion and total abstinence became one and the same thing. The Geneva Presbytery reported that the "cause of Temperance is regarded as holding an intimate relation to the revival."[31] In the other societies a similar transition to the barn-storming technique of revivalism became obvious in the "Great Offensive" which began in 1829.[32]

The most obvious indication of this change was the organization of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. The older colonization society was a reflection of the former society leadership and by its very nature could not be changed, as in the case of the other societies, to fit the requirements of the new. Immediate emancipation was only another expression of the religious life which demanded immediate conversion.

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[31] Narrative of the Late Revivals, p. 6.

[32] Foster, Errand of Mercy, p. 179.

As early as 1827 the Synod of Indiana rejected the traditional Presbyterian position that the slaves were "not prepared for the enjoyment of civil liberty" because of a faulty religious education. In a memorial to the General Assembly the Synod asked, "Can those who are real Christians offer such a plea?" Just as the new breed of Presbyterians demanded immediate surrender to God in the revivals they demanded immediate abolition of a system that outraged alike "the laws of God, the spirit of the gospel, the dictates of humanity, and the principles of justice."[33] By the time the American Anti-Slavery Society was founded in 1833, the whole society movement had moved toward this point of view. Knowledge was good--but holiness was believed to be better.

As the societies made this transition many Old School Presbyterians gave up their position of leadership, which made the transition even swifter. One of the few who made a public explanation for his departure was Stephen N. Rowan, who had been moderator of the General Assembly in 1825 and one of the most ardent supporters of the societies. Rowan's criticism of the societies reflected his concern with their recent tendencies toward New England theology and revivalism. Rowan attacked the revivalists, considering Finney and the more conservative Nettleton in the same category, and gave it as his opinion that the "human mind needs instruction rather than excitement." He further contended that the societies had become "the engines of a party" and taught doctrines which he believed to be unscriptural.[34]

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[33] "Records of the Synod of Indiana," pp. 267-270.

Rowan's criticism went beyond these major issues and included items of both religious and social significance. He condemned the societies as "anomalous, wild, irregular, and impetuous in their movements, and thus subversive of all my views of good ecclesiastical order." This criticism was aimed at lay leadership and the absence of supervision over the societies by "some responsible and organized ecclesiastical judicature." Rowan claimed that the societies were being run by "worldly-minded" men who were "qualified neither by talents nor by influence," and who had "no ecclesiastical responsibilities." In addition, Rowan felt that the general tendency of the societies was to detract from the social status of ministers and religion. Although he criticized the wealthy leaders of the societies for displaying their "vanity in trumpeted munificent donations," he claimed that the lack of ecclesiastical control caused "Our great, and our rich . . . (to) withhold their influence and wealth." Perhaps the final insult was that the "salary allowance" for missionaries of the American Home Missionary Society, which was substantially less than that of the average Presbyterian minister, was "becoming the standard of remuneration for the services of regularly settled Pastors." Rowan himself received about three times this amount plus a house and complained that he found it necessary to resort "to collateral ecclesiastical avocations, in order to support my family."[35]

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[34] Farewell Address (London, 1828), pp. 21-29.

III

The result of the Old School dissatisfaction with the societies was a new conception of the denomination. The new theory was simple. In addition to its former functions, the denomination was to be considered as a "missionary society." The Old School Presbyterians generally credited this "discovery" to John H. Rice. Rice held that the church ought to "consider herself as a great missionary society, instituted for the conversion of the world; and that henceforth she would make that her great object."[36] Whether Rice was the first Presbyterian leader to make this distinction or not, by 1830 it was becoming commonplace among supporters of the Old School. By 1831, Joshua Wilson, best known for his prosecution of Lyman Beecher, had elevated this idea to the status of religious orthodoxy. In _Four Propositions Sustained Against the Claims of the American Home Missionary Society_, Wilson held that,

> I. The management of Christian missions is committed by the Lord Jesus Christ to his church.
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> . . . .

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[35] _Ibid._, pp. 14, 21-29.

[36] Quoted in Alexander, _Pastoral Office_, pp. 13-14.

> II. That the Presbyterian church is, by her form of government, organized into a Christian Missionary Society.
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> . . . .
>
> III. That the American Home Missionary Society is not an ecclesiastical but a civil Institution.
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> . . . .
>
> IV. That the American Home Missionary Society . . . disturbs the peace and injures the prosperity of the Presbyterian church.[37]

The new concept of the denomination actually was broad enough to include all functions of the societies, but since missions and ministerial education most affected the denomination they received the initial attention. Wilson's Four Propositions actually appeared just previous to a convention, scheduled for November in Cincinnati, which was to decide whether missions in the West would be carried out by the General Assembly or the American Home Missionary Society. The convention resulted in a total stalemate between Old School supporters of the new theory of the denomination and New School proponents of the idea that the only proper function of the denomination was internal government.[38]

After the schism of 1837 Presbyterianism in America was represented by two denominations, each with a different conception of what that meant. The New School continued to cooperate with voluntary societies in every function not related to its internal government. The Old School, operating on the idea that the denomination was a "missionary society," strengthened the Board of Home Missions and the Board of Education and in 1837 established a Board of Foreign Missions. But the new theory of the denomination went further. It included all those areas of labor previously performed by the societies. In 1838 the Old School organized a Board of Publication, thus becoming a "tract society" in addition to a "missionary" and "education" society.

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[37] (Cincinnati, 1831), pp. 4-9.

[38] For a minute of the convention see Moore, History of Huron Presbytery, pp. 78-79.

In 1837 the national goals of early nineteenth century Presbyterianism, while perhaps partly achieved, appeared to be impossible of total accomplishment and the schism itself meant that the strategy, and even the goals themselves, would have to be altered further. In many ways, however, the two halves of Presbyterianism each represented a particular trait that would become characteristic of American Protestantism--the Old School in its conception of the denomination, which even the New School came to accept after mid-century, and the New School in its revivalistic orientation and preference for "holiness" over "knowledge."

APPENDIX

That the Presbyterian understanding of religious liberty, and the related concept of freedom of conscience, did not exclude the possibility of some sort of establishment on a theoretical basis is indicated in the writings of Witherspoon. In his discussion of jurisprudence, having concluded that virtue was necessary to the prosperity of a nation and that any government was good which had a tendency to make men virtuous, Witherspoon posed the question, "What can be done by law to make the people of any state virtuous?" His unequivocal response was that, "If . . . virtue and piety are inseparably connected, then _to promote true religion is the best and most effectual way of making a virtuous and regular people_."[1]

While Witherspoon held that one of the chief functions of the magistrate was "to defend the rights of conscience," he did not conceive active support of the "true religion" by the magistrate as a violation of that "natural right." In this context Witherspoon entertained the subject of toleration of Catholicism. He felt that the reasoning may be "just" which denied toleration to "Popery" on the basis that its tenets were "subversive of society and inconsistent with the rights of others." While he rejected this position in favor of "toleration" because "such as hold absurd tenets are seldom dangerous," it is evident that his concept of freedom of conscience was something less than an absolute right. In fact, a policy of toleration, in Witherspoon's view, should be balanced by a policy of state support for Protestant Christianity. Since toleration could have some harmful results the state could only refrain from the exercise of "censorial power" if these effects were offset by "supporting the religious sects . . . , for the particular discipline of each sect, is intended for the correction of manners."[2]

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[1] Witherspoon, _Lectures_, p. 110.

In this context, Witherspoon discerned three functions within the scope of governmental policy toward religion. First, the magistrates "ought to encourage piety" by example and "discontenence those whom it would be improper to punish." Second, "The magistrate may enact laws for the punishment of acts of profanity and impiety." Although men may differ in religious opinion, the rights of conscience were not to be used as sanctions for acts that any of the "sects" counted profane. Finally, Witherspoon felt that there was "a good deal of reason" for the opinion that "the magistrate ought to make public provision for the worship of God, in such manner as is agreeable to the great body of the society." Although all dissenters ought to be fully tolerated, government should do this "so instruction may be provided for the bulk of common people, who would, many of them, neither support nor employ teachers, unless they were obliged." Witherspoon explained that "The magistrates right in this case, seems to be something like that of a parent, they have a right to instruct, but not to constrain."[3] Thus, in Witherspoon's thought the concepts of freedom of conscience and religious liberty were not inconsistent with an establishment of Protestantism.

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[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 110-112.

The fullest expression of this aspect of Presbyterian thinking was An Essay on the Influence of Religion in Civil Society by Thomas Reese, graduate of the College of New Jersey and minister in South Carolina. This appeal for the government to take a more active role in the support of religion appeared in 1783, a crucial time in American life so far as questions of church and state were concerned. Reese's argument was based on the thought of Witherspoon. He emphasized the "moral sense" and argued that it was necessary that the laws of society conform to natural law before a nation could prosper. In America the "security of life, liberty and property," could not be attained without the support of religion. In a lengthy discussion Reese drew out what he believed to be the influence of Christianity on society and concluded, without any appeal to an authority higher than reason, that Christianity could best serve that function in American society. It was his conviction that "The more strongly men are influenced by its (Christianity's) motives, and the more perfectly they are conformed to its precepts, the better members of civil society they will be; and the greater the number of such in any state, other things being equal, the higher it will rise in the scale of political glory and happiness."[4]

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[3] Ibid., pp. 111-113; James Hastings Nichols, "John Witherspoon on Church and State," Journal of Presbyterian History, XLII (September, 1964), 166-174.

Reese apologized for "taking so much pains to prove what very few either doubt or deny," but felt obligated to do this because the subject had "been too much over-looked."

> The necessity of morality to the commonwealth being once granted, the necessity of religion will unavoidably follow; and certainly that which is necessary, not only to the *well-being*, but to the very *existence* of civil society, must be worthy the attention of civil rulers. Without entering into any dispute concerning the power of civil magistrates *circa sacra*, we lay it down as certain, that they may do much for the support and encouragement of religion, without the least encroachment on the prerogative of him who is the supreme head of the church. They may, and ought to do much, by their pious example, which in persons of high rank and authority has an amazing weight and influence. They may without any invasion of the rights of conscience, take measures for the instruction of subjects in the important doctrines and precepts of Christianity, which so evidently tend to the safety of the body politic.[5]

While this pattern of thought is by now clear, Reese is significant because he applied it directly to the American situation. He was primarily concerned about South Carolina, and felt that unless the government took some immediate action the whole state would sink into barbarism. The source of the problem, he thought, was "the want of public teachers, properly qualified to instruct . . . in the doctrines and precepts of Christianity." This dilemma could only be solved satisfactorily, according to Reese, by providing for the education of "pious and promising youth" and the financial support of ministers. Concerning the first item, Reese was not specific. He rejected the idea that proper ministers could be obtained from foreign countries because these men could not be expected to "show the same zeal for the support and prosperity of our free constitutions," as native Americans. The state rather should find some way to "make learning cheap and convenient." While he believed that this would increase the supply of potential ministers, he also felt that it would help stem the tide of barbarism by providing the masses with a religious education. On this point Reese was adamant. "If parents either cannot, or will not provide for, and educate their children, in a proper manner, it would certainly be just and expedient, to take them out of their hands, and have them brought up in such a way, as might afford some rational prospect of their being useful to society."[6]

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[4] Thomas Reese, *An Essay on the Influence of Religion in Civil Society* (Charleston, 1783), pp. 5, 22-23, 72-73.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

With reference to the support of ministers, however, Reese was more specific. The state ought to provide for them from a general religious tax. The argument of "those formerly called Dissenters" that religion should be supported by "the free contributions of the people," Reese believed to be only applicable "where the people are generally sensible of the utility of religion, and disposed to contribute." "It ought however to be considered," he contended, "that in many parts of our state, the people are so totally sunk in vice and ignorance, that they have scarcely any idea of the necessity and importance of religion; and consequently will not exert themselves, either to obtain or support public teachers." Since it was Reese's whole contention that religion was necessary to the existence of the state, he felt that there was no more injustice in "obliging" citizens to support Christianity than there was in requiring them to pay taxes for the support of government. Nor did Reese see "any just cause of complaint on the score of conscience, provided every one be left at liberty to pay to whatever denomination of the clergy he pleases." Not only did Reese believe such an establishment to be consistent with freedom of conscience, he believed such to be necessary to the preservation of religious liberty. In an emotional plea, Reese voiced the American Corollary and its implications.

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[6] Ibid., pp. 74-79.

> Suffer me then, my dear country men, to address you with all seriousness on this subject. After having displayed so much virtue and valor, in the course of a most arduous and trying struggle; and at last, through the signal interposition of Heaven, brought our affairs to such a happy issue, what a reproach will it be to us, if by suffering ourselves to be effeminated with luxury, and plunged in vice, we tarnish all that glory which we have acquired, and lose the fruits of so much blood and treasure! Would you preserve those liberties, which have been bought with the blood of thousands of your brave countrymen?

> Be virtuous. Would you rise to the summit of glory and felicity which was the end of your separation from Great-Britain? Support religion. . . .[7]

While on a theoretical level an establishment of the Protestant denominations was the logical conclusion from contemporary Presbyterian thought, in the American context such a plan soon proved to be impossible. Reese himself admitted that "some difficulties would probably arise in the execution" of the plan he had proposed. For his own part, Reese did not want to make the ministry independent of the people and he avowed that he would be "one of the last men in South-Carolina to propose, or consent to" a law which gave support to ministers who were "idle, ignorant or vicious."[8] This attitude, which was characteristic of the vast majority of Presbyterian ministers, eventually enabled or perhaps forced them to cooperate with other elements of the American population to defeat the formal establishment of religion.

II

With the Presbyterians, as well as with all Americans in the Middle and Southern states, the significant discussion and action concerning establishment came in Virginia. Of all the possible constructions placed on the activity of the Presbyterians in Virginia, those that derive a consistency are most blatantly false. While there were at all times differences among Presbyterians themselves, there seems to have been four positions which commanded sufficient support to be recognized by the official Presbyterian body in Virginia, the Presbytery of Hanover. These positions followed consecutively between 1747 and 1785 and all of them were conditioned by the legal situation existing at the time and each was aimed primarily at bettering the status of Presbyterianism.

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[7] _Ibid_., pp. 79-84.

[8] _Ibid_., pp. 80-81.

Between 1747 and 1776, under the leadership of Samuel Davies, the Presbyterians sought to gain the legal rights available under the English Toleration Act. This phase is of no concern in the present discussion. From 1776 to 1779 the Presbyterians resisted favored status for Episcopalianism and in so doing approached a position of sanctioning total disestablishment. After 1779 when it became apparent that there could be a plural rather than an exclusive establishment, the Presbyterians sought to have this conform to Presbyterian polity, while they continued to resist any special privileges for Episcopalians. In 1785 the Presbyterian clergy responded to various pressures and became for the first time supporters of total disestablishment. In so doing, however, they did not intentionally support a separation of church and state but rather "freedom of religion" which envisioned a society integrated by Protestant Christianity.

In memorials to the General Assembly of Virginia in

1776 and 1777 the Presbytery of Hanover stated their position at that time. The first of these is well-known and often cited as a classic argument for the separation of church and state. That interpretation is serviceable only in so far as it is remembered that the whole document is the production of a dissenting sect fighting for what it conceived to be its rights under a new form of government. "We should fall short in our duty to ourselves, and the many and numerous congregations under our care, were we, upon this occasion, to neglect laying before you a state of the religious grievances under which we have hitherto laboured; that they no longer may be continued in our present form of government." In this attempt the Presbytery developed an argument against establishment, which happened to be the status of Episcopalianism at that time. According to the Presbytery, establishments violated the rights of dissenters since religious liberty was a part of civil liberty. Any argument for the establishment of Christianity could be equally applicable to Islam, "or if this be not true, it is at least impossible for the magistrate to adjudge the right of preference among the various sects . . . without erecting a chair of infallibility, which would lead us back to the church of Rome." That the Presbyterians were primarily concerned with the exclusive establishment of Episcopalianism, however, is indicated by the fact that they pointed to the practical argument that establishment hurt the temporal interests of the community by preventing the migration of dissenters. At that time there seemed to be no idea of a plural establishment current in Virginia. Establishment seemed to mean to the Presbytery only favor to one sect. "Therefore we ask no ecclesiastical establishments for ourselves; neither can we approve of them when granted to others. This indeed would be giving exclusive or separate emoluments or privileges to one set (or sect) of men." Thus, while the memorial argues no consistent theoretical position for disestablishment, it does indicate a consistent opposition to Episcopalian privileges.[9]

In November of 1776 the General Assembly of Virginia considered a general assessment for the support of all churches, which would have amounted to a plural establishment. No action was taken at the time in order that the opinion of various ranks of citizens could be obtained. In response to this proposal the Presbytery of Hanover sent a second memorial, which was similar to the one of a year earlier except that the Presbytery now expressly declared their opposition to a plural establishment. They announced their desire that "our Legislature would never extend any assessment for religious purposes to us, or to the congregations under our care."[10]

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[9] The memorial is cited in full in William Henry Foote, Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical (2nd ed., Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), pp. 323-324. This work was originally published in 1850.

[10] The memorial is cited in full in ibid., pp. 326-327.

There is some evidence, however, that points to the conclusion that fear of Episcopal dominance continued to be the operative force behind the action of the Presbytery. Caleb Wallace, the Presbyterian deputy to the Virginia Assembly, explained the circumstances behind the memorial. While the Virginia Bill of Rights granted free exercise of religion, Wallace felt that "in some subsequent Acts it is manifest that our Assembly designed to continue the old Church Establishment." This, together with "what was said and done in a more private way against dissenters" led the Presbytery to present the memorial.[11] In addition, the memorial was prepared by Samuel Stanhope Smith and David Rice who were sympathetic to state support of religion. At a later time Smith proposed a coalition between Presbyterians and Episcopalians in Virginia to obtain the general assessment.[12] All this seems to indicate that the Presbyterians were more opposed to Episcopal privileges than general assessment.

This appears more plausible in light of the change in position taken by the Presbytery of Hanover after a detailed plan for a general assessment was presented to the Assembly in 1779. From that time until 1784 the Presbyterian ministers of Virginia followed the pattern of thought indicated by Witherspoon and Reese. While there was no statement during this period denouncing plural establishment or general assessment, the Presbyterians continued to object to any special privileges for the Episcopal churches and made known the circumstances under which a plural establishment would be acceptable to them. That is, they wrestled with what Reese had called "difficulties . . . in the execution."

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[11] Quoted in H. J. Eckenrode, Virginia State Library: Separation of Church and State in Virginia (Richmond: Davis Bottom, 1910), p. 51.

[12] Sellers, "John Blair Smith," 212-214.

The change in the Presbyterian position was immediately noted by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, who as politicians could be expected to know their friends and enemies on this issue so important to them. Madison said of the Presbyterian clergy that they "seem as ready to set up an establishment which is to take them in as they were to pull down that which shut them out. I do not know a more shameful contrast than might be found between their memorials on the latter and former occasion."[13] Jefferson also took cognizance of this change by declaring that "some of our dissenting allies, having now secured their particular object, (had gone) over to the advocates of a general assessment."[14]

The general assessment bill of 1779 was presented to the General Assembly on October 25 by James Henry. The bill stated that "The Christian religion shall in all times coming be deemed and held to be the established Religion of this Commonwealth." All denominations subscribing to five articles would be included in the establishment. These articles were:

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[13] Quoted in Eckenrode, Church and State in Virginia, p. 91.

[14] Quoted in ibid., p. 64.

> First, That there is one Eternal God and a future state of rewards and punishments.
> Secondly, That God is publickly to be Worshiped.
> Thirdly, That the Christian Religion is the true Religion.
> Fourthly, That the Holy Scriptures of the old and new Testament are of divine inspiration, and are the only rule of Faith.
> Fifthly, That it is the duty of every Man, when thereunto called by those who Govern, to bear witness to truth.

The bill further called for the incorporation of all denominations, provided that the people should elect their own pastors, and included an additional oath requiring ministers "to teach nothing . . . but that which he shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved from the Scriptures." Finally, the bill proposed the method of collecting the assessment, penalties for failure to comply, and required nothing to be spoken in religious assemblies which would be seditious.[15]

Unfortunately, the memorial from the Presbytery of Hanover in response to this proposal has been lost. This loss is somewhat alleviated by the fact that the memorial of 1784, in response to an almost identical bill, has been preserved in full. That the 1779 memorial was not a rejection of the establishment of Christianity but an attempt to change some details of the bill is indicated by two factors. First, the minutes of the Presbytery refers to the memorial as "A memorial to the Assembly of Virginia . . . to abstain from interfering in the government of the church."[16] The second factor is that of the two memorials sent in 1784, when the same issue was being debated, neither rejected plural establishment.

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[15] The bill is cited in full in ibid., pp. 58-61.

[16] Quoted in Foote, Sketches of Virginia, p. 332.

The first memorial of 1784, written in May, does not mention the general establishment bill. While this silence may in itself be significant, the contents of the memorial exhibit a change in position from that of 1776. There is no mention of disestablishment. The whole memorial complains of inequality and the continuing favored position of Episcopalianism. The tone of the memorial was set at the beginning when the Presbytery announced that it had hoped and expected from the Revolution "An entire and everlasting freedom from every species of ecclesiastical combination . . . and an equal share of the protection and favour of government to all denominations of Christians." The Presbytery had "supposed that any . . . particular and illicit-connection or commerce between the State, and one description of Christians more than another . . . , would be unworthy of the representatives of a people perfectly free."

The body of the memorial complained that the Episcopal church had continued to enjoy a station of "unjust pre-eminence." The evidence cited by the Presbytery was that that church had retained a large "estate" from the time of its establishment, was incorporated whereas other denominations were not, had more lenient regulations than other denominations for performing marriages, and was still able to collect some funds through the force of law.

Since the general establishment bill was framed in the context of the necessity of morality and religion to the state and supported by Patrick Henry, a close friend to a number of Presbyterian ministers and trustee of Hampden-Sidney College, the memorial may have been a statement of cautious support for the bill. The Presbytery noted, "That uncommon liberality of sentiment, which seems daily to gain ground in this enlightened period, encourages us to hope from your wisdom and integrity, gentlemen, a redress of every grievance and remedy of every abuse." The abuse now noted was not an establishment but inequality of support for the various denominations. The Presbytery warned that "we still resolutely engage against any monopoly of the honours or rewards of government by any one sect of Christians more than the rest." Finally, the Presbytery declared,

> We hope that the Legislature will adopt some measures to remove present inequality, and resist any attempt, either at their present session or hereafter, to continue those which we now complain of. Thus by preserving a proper regard to every religious denomination as the common protectors of piety and virtue, you will remove every real ground of contention, and allay every jealous commotion on the score of religion.[17]

If there could be some doubt about the full implications of this memorial, the action of the Presbytery of Hanover in October of that same year made the Presbyterian position plain. At that meeting the Presbytery adopted a "plan . . . agreeably to which alone Presbytery are willing to admit a general assessment for the support of religion by law." According to the minutes the outline of this plan was as follows:

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[17] Quoted in full in ibid., pp. 333-334.

> 1st. Religion as a spiritual system is not to be considered as an object of human legislation, but may in a civil view, as preserving the existence and promoting the happiness of society. 2d. That public worship and public periodical instruction to the people, be maintained in this view by a general assessment for this purpose. 3d. That every man, as a good citizen, be obliged to declare himself attached to some religious community, publicly known to profess the belief of one God, his righteous providence, our accountableness to him, and a future state of rewards and punishments. 4th. That every citizen should have liberty annually to direct his assessed proportion to such community as he chooses. 5th. That twelve titheables, or more, to the amount of one hundred and fifty families, as near as local circumstances will admit, shall be incorporated, and exclusively direct the application of the money contributed for their support. Messrs. Todd, Graham, Smith and Montgomery are appointed to present the memorial, and attend the assembly with the plan of an assessment.[18]

In addition to this plan the Presbytery addressed another memorial to the Assembly, which was directed toward the same end. It was by now clear that the Presbyterians were not opposed to a general establishment of Christianity on the basis of principle. In fact the memorial of October, 1784 contained a defense of this posture. While religion did not require the aid of government for its support, declared the memorial,

> . . . it is absolutely necessary to the existence and welfare of every political combination of men in society, to have the support of religion and its solemn institutions, as affecting the conduct of rational beings more than human laws can possibly do. On this account it is wise policy in legislators to seek its

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[18] Quoted in ibid., p. 338.

> alliance and solicit its aid in a civil view, because of its happy influence upon the morality of its citizens, and its tendency to preserve the veneration of an oath, or an appeal to heaven, which is the cement of the social union. It is upon this principle alone, in our opinion, that a legislative body has a right to interfere in religion at all. . . .[19]

At this point the Presbytery of Hanover was expressing the opinion most congenial to Presbyterians. This did not for them entail a surrender of their position on freedom of conscience. As with Witherspoon and Reese, the Presbytery of Hanover believed a general establishment of Protestant Christianity to be compatible with the rights of conscience. The Presbytery only begged of the Assembly that "no scheme of an assessment will be encouraged which will violate the happy privilege we now enjoy of thinking for ourselves in all cases where conscience is concerned." While the Presbytery did not believe that legislation requiring "every man, as a good citizen . . . to declare himself attached to some religious community" professing Protestant Christianity was an infringement on the rights of conscience, there were some aspects of the assessment bill that they believed did infringe on those rights. "We hope that no attempt will be made to point out articles of faith, that are not essential to the preservation of society; or to settle modes of worship; or to interfere in the internal government of religious communities; or to render the ministers of religion independent of the will of the people whom they serve." The proposed scheme would have given the state a right to decide what ministers, regardless of denomination, would receive support. This the Presbyterians considered an infringement of the rights of conscience on two counts. First, it would give to the state the power reserved in Presbyterian polity to the Presbytery. This would be interfering in "internal government" and make the minister "independent" of the people he served. Second, this regulation would imply that the minister received his authority from the state while "real ministers of true religion, derive their authority to act in the duties of their profession from a higher source than any Legislature on earth." Thus the Presbyterian policy in Virginia from the first proposal of a general establishment of Protestant Christianity in 1779 through 1784 was one of support on the condition that the law would not violate freedom of conscience as understood by the Presbyterians.

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[19] The memorial is quoted in full in ibid., pp. 336-338.

H. J. Eckenrode, who has written the most complete history of these events in Virginia, argued that the Presbyterian clergy accepted a general establishment as a "fait accompli" and attempted only to make it as harmless as possible. Because his interpretation has been widely accepted, it is necessary to point out the basis on which he made that claim. As evidence for his point of view he cited the work of Foote and John Holt Rice and accepted their statements over those of Jefferson and Madison to the contrary. Foote, on the other hand, acquired his information from the manuscript edition of

John Blair Hoge, Sketch of the Life and Character of the Rev. Moses Hoge, which has recently (1964) been published in a limited edition by the Library of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. The younger Hoge wrote this biography of his father around 1823 when the Presbyterians were having some difficulty with charges of attempting to bring about a connection of church and state. Since separation had become admired to the point that it was nearly treason to hold any other position, Hoge naturally wanted to defend both his father and Presbyterians by hailing them as champions for the separation of church and state during the original struggle. Among other things, his constructions of the various memorials are so blatantly incorrect that it calls into question any other argument he may have advanced.[20] Foote accepted Hoge's conclusion and demonstrated his own further bias by trying to play down the plan of assessment as having only the support of "some, at least" of the members of the Presbytery, when obviously a majority would have been required to adopt the measure.[21]

Eckenrode made the mistake of accepting all of this from Foote, plus bringing in Rice as a person "in a good position to know the facts." Foote quoted a statement made by Rice in 1826. On March 17, 1830 Rice wrote to Francis Bowman requesting information about the events from 1776 to

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[20] See especially pp. 38-40.

[21] Foote, Sketches of Virginia, p. 338.

1785. He told Bowman, "I believe that Presbyterians aided in it more than is generally known; and I wish, if possible, to prove it. As far as I can see, there is a mighty effort now to discredit, and if possible, to put down Presbyterianism."[22] Thus Eckenrode accepted the information of a man admittedly ignorant four years after the date of his supposedly knowledgeable statement, and a man engaged in a polemic on the subject. One would certainly opt for the greater reliability of the statements of Jefferson and Madison who were both involved in the struggle and who, as politicians, would have been eager to know their friends and foes, and both of these men testified that the Presbyterian clergy favored the general establishment bill.[23]

Between the meetings of the Presbytery of Hanover in October, 1784 and Man, 1785 the members of that body began to have second thoughts on the assessment question. This seems to have been because of lingering fears of Episcopal domination and the pressure from Presbyterian laymen. The laity of western Virginia were opposed to taxes in general and a religious tax in particular. This feeling was so strong by May, 1785 that a number of laymen attended the sessions of the Presbytery, which then called a general convention to discuss the issue. The convention met in Augusta County on August 13, after its purpose had been publicly advertised in an effort to secure a larger attendance. This convention composed largely of laymen sent to the Virginia Assembly the first decisive Presbyterian statement calling for disestablishment. The memorial began, "The Ministers and Lay Representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Virginia, assembled in Convention. . . ."[24] The memorial was as extraordinary for Presbyterianism of the day as was the "convention" that drafted it.

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[22] The letter is reproduced in Maxwell, Memoir of John H. Rice, pp. 372-374.

[23] Fortunately some scholars of a more recent era have done independent research in this area with different results. Sellers, "John Blair Smith"; Ralph L. Ketcham, "James Madison and Religion--A New Hypothesis," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXXVIII (June, 1960), 80; and Marvin K. Singleton, "Colonial Virginia as First Amendment Matrix: Henry, Madison, and Assessment Establishment," A Journal of Church and State, VIII (Autumn, 1966), 344-364 all seem to be in basic agreement with the direction taken by the reconstruction in this paper. Ketcham and Singleton do not speak directly to the issue but assume that the Presbyterian clergy supported assessment. Sellers treats the whole episode and agrees substantially with my own interpretation.

In October John Blair Smith and William Graham presented the new Presbyterian position in the Assembly at a meeting of a committee of the whole.[25] Madison assessed the change in the Presbyterian position in the following language:

> The Presbyterian clergy, have at length espoused the side of the opposition, being moved either by a

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[24] The memorial is reproduced in Foote, Sketches of Virginia, pp. 342-344.

[25] Smith at least had at one time favored the assessment, but now spoke against it. Graham on the other hand was at least one Presbyterian minister who had consistently opposed the assessment. Graham was of western Pennsylvania and a radical democrat who wrote the constitution for the state of Franklin. Cf. ibid., pp. 345-346; Sellers, "John Blair Smith," pp. 212-214; Memoirs of William Graham, passim.

> fear of their laity or a jealousy of the episcopalians. The natural hatred of these sects has been much inflamed by the late Act incorporating the latter. I am far from being sorry for it, as a coalition between them could alone endanger our religious rights, and a tendency to such an event had been suspected.[26]

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[26] Quoted in Eckenrode, Separation of Church and State in Virginia, p. 107. Sellers states that such a proposal was actually made by Samuel Stanhope Smith and supported by his brother, John Blair. See "John Blair Smith," p. 211.

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ABSTRACT

PRESBYTERIANISM AND THE NEW AMERICAN NATION, 1783-1826:

A CASE STUDY OF RELIGION AND NATIONAL LIFE

Fred J. Hood

As a case study this thesis intends an analysis of Presbyterianism in relation to the American nation rather than a history of the denomination. Part I is an attempt to understand how the Presbyterians interpreted events in America and how they wished to shape the future of America. The social, political and economic views of Presbyterians are examined in their religious context. Presbyterian thought about the nation is explored under the categories of the doctrine of providence, liberty, and the vision of the millennium.

Under the influence of the moral philosophy of John Witherspoon and Samuel Stanhope Smith, the doctrine of providence became imbued with a rational understanding of natural law which made man the controlling factor of his own destiny. On a national level, it was believed that a nation could secure the blessings of providence by conforming to the dictates of natural law. As understood by the

Presbyterians, this indicated a one to one ratio between national prosperity and national allegiance to Protestant Christianity.

The most logical conclusion from the doctrine of providence would have been some sort of national establishment of Protestant Christianity. As this proved impossible in the American context, the Presbyterians developed a theory of church-state relationship which called for an intimate "association between Religion and Patriotism." This concept was a coalescence of the ideas of the doctrine of providence and the Presbyterian understanding of religious liberty. Since the Presbyterians understood both religious liberty and civil liberty to be concepts integral to Protestant Christianity, this American Corollary to the doctrine of providence envisioned ~~an~~ informal establishment with Christian officials and laws conforming to the natural law.

The supreme religious symbol of the Presbyterians was the vision of the millennium. Incorporating other aspects of Presbyterian thought about the nation, the vision of the millennium portrayed a rather conservative economic, social and political society dominated by a unified "church." The coming of the millennium was believed to be immanent and intimately connected with the efforts of American Christians and the American nation. The process was understood as a gradual one in which progress would be marked by an accelerated indoctrination of all "classes" of society in the "knowledge of the Lord," or the "system of doctrines" espoused by Presbyterians.

Part II is an attempt to demonstrate in what ways and through what religious institutions the Presbyterians sought to transform their national goals into reality. The prevailing understanding of the denomination presupposed that the civil government would provide religious cohesion for the entire society. The denomination was thus conceived to be an institution primarily for the internal government of the church. When it became obvious that such was not the case in America, the Presbyterians made several largely unsuccessful attempts to change the denomination into a more aggressive institution.

Voluntary societies, instituted for particular functions believed to have national significance, became the primary religious institutions through which Presbyterians labored to implement their national goals. The societies provided institutions for the "association between Religion and Patriotism" which was impossible either in civil government or the denominations. The societies were designed to influence those "classes" of society which were beyond the pale of organized religious life, primarily the Indians, Negroes, frontiersmen and the poor of the cities. The salvation offered by the societies was of a this-worldly collective variety based on indoctrination rather than an other-worldly individual type based on conversion.

An epilogue, based on questions arising out of the study, indicates some factors involved in a basic change in American religious life between 1826 and 1837.